SPECIAL ANNIVERSARY ISSUE

■ Original Hits! Original Stars!: Taylor Branch, Russell Baker, Suzannah Lessard, Gregg Easterbrook, James Fallows, and Michael Kinsley ■ Plus new releases: Sydney H. Schanberg and Joseph Nocera

The Washington Monthly

FEBRUARY 1989/$3.00

Spy Anxiety

The smart magazine that makes smart people nervous about their status

20TH ANNIVERSARY YEAR 1989

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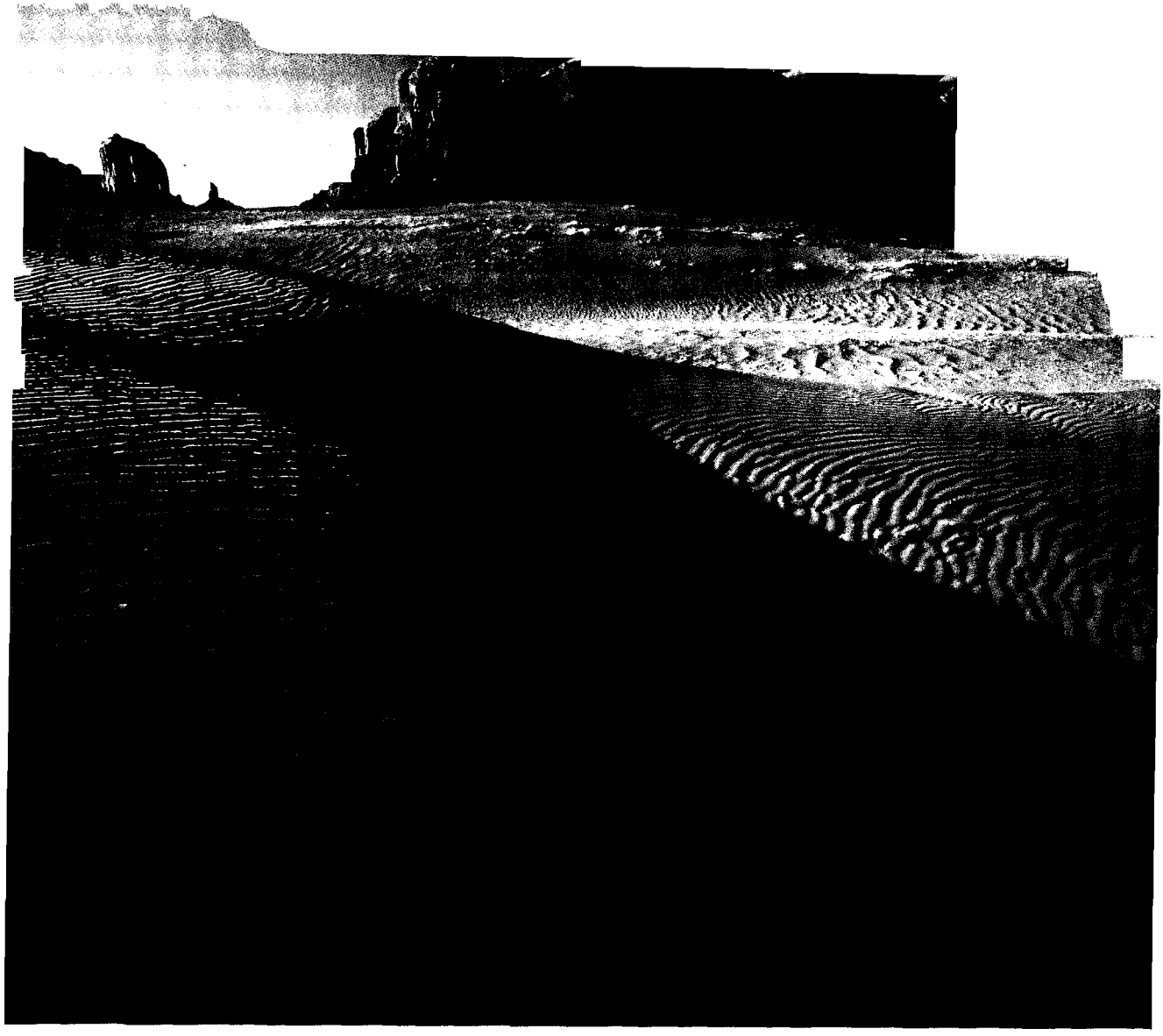

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It is *Dinetah,* The Land of The People, the Navajo People. It is wild and beautiful. And harsh.

Growing corn in this land also grows character in The People. They know about husbanding resources carefully, and about hard work. Their skilled hands make beautiful rugs and jewelry.

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In 1989 we will open our second plant on Navajo land, employing nearly 200 more Native American workers. The land of the Navajo may look wild and harsh.

But for business, it is some of the most productive land in the country.

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LETTERS

Of handicaps and denial

While admiring Paul Glastris's ability to pull himself up by his own bootstraps (with a little help from affirmative action, to be sure), the basic premise of his article ["The Case for Denial," December] is questionable.

Glastris doesn't think it's possible for people to be empowered by emphasizing those things that make them different. But there is much variation among groups of people with physical disabilities. Many deaf people, for example, are part of a vibrant deaf community in which power and relative freedom come precisely because deafness is emphasized. The World Games for the Deaf and the Miss Deaf America pageant are two examples.

What about dealing with problems facing people with disabilities? By emphasizing the things which make one different, one can ensure that appropriate steps are taken to remove the barriers to our full potential. And the more people are involved, the more group consciousness as it were, the more likely are the chances for success.

JOHN B. CHRISTIANSEN
University Park, Maryland

As a 58-year leg-brace-wearing survivor of polio, I cannot thank you enough for Paul Glastris's article. I decided the major function of these exploitations was to let the Totally Normal feel grateful they only suffer from thin hair or a zit now and then.

I'm glad we now have ramps as well as stairs, close-captioned TV, and a dim recognition that not everyone functions with all bodyparts at 100 percent. Having gotten that out of the way, it's all right with me if everyone—handicapped and non—develops a good case of denial.

ILVA WALKER
Rio Rancho, New Mexico

To say that the disabled movement is worthless is, at least, self-serving, and at most, denying solace for a great many people.

My disabling handicap involves 28 years of suffering from mental illness. Although Mr. Glastris seems to have made his way, many others with disabilities are not so lucky. He only gives passing mention of what such movements have gained for us with handicaps.

Hooray for Mr. Glastris; he found his way alone. But for many of us, the comfort of our support groups pave the way for everyday living.

R. MIKE HARVEY SR.
Houston, Texas

Paul Glastris assumes that accepting one's disability means surrendering to it. One can face disability and still demand of oneself more than the average "normal" person ever does. Severely deafened, I have gained a Ph.D. from a major university, worked as a professional writer and editor, taught graduate students, and served as a trustee of a small foundation. My deafness has propelled me further than I might have gone without it.

YOU CAN HELP

Sometimes it's easy to forget how much the *Monthly* depends on its readers. Our Memos of the Month come almost entirely from you. Clippings from your local papers inspire many of the items in Tidbits and Outrages and Tilting at Windmills.

Readers help us in countless other ways, calling with tips for stories, giving their friends subscriptions, or just making sure we're on the shelves of their local newsstands, libraries, and bookstores.

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But I remain severely hearing impaired nonetheless. My acceptance of that identity—rather than imprisoning me—has freed me.

I had feared becoming one of *them* by admitting my disability. Shedding my learned assumption that only the normal are acceptable, I found out that there is no bogey here—there is no *them*. I did not defeat myself by admitting my handicap; rather, I mastered my own fear.

KATHLEEN SPALTRO
Evanston, Illinois

Would you publish an article by a female journalist talking about how hard she tries to act like a male and suggesting that successful women should not be proud of their femaleness? Or an article by a black person or Chicano person that suggests whiteness as a goal?

Yet you published an article of this type by Paul Glastris. From his description of himself, he has been able to "pass" as normal and has not faced the discrimination experienced by people with more visible disabilities (such as blindness or the many handicaps that require the use of a wheelchair). But the price is high. Until the group is able to successfully mobilize itself to end the discrimination, *most* of the people in the group remain powerless. I am disturbed because Glastris appears to put down those who have chosen to fight.

There are disability stories that should be covered by the *Monthly*. For example, the government spent $60 million last year on disability. Of that, only $3 million was for education of handicapped children and vocational rehabilitation. The rest of the money (95 percent!) was for programs such as Social Security disability income and public assistance predicated on people's inability to work. Yet, a Harris survey showed that two out of three disabled people who are not working want to work.

Why aren't they working? Well, for one thing, if they are on Medicare or Medicaid, if they work, they usually lose their health insurance. For people with many conditions, that can mean the threat of dying without medical care. Buses are inaccessible, and wheelchairs cannot get on them, so how can the person get to work? And, private employers can legally discriminate against a qualified applicant with a disability. They can say (as was said to me once), "Sorry, we won't hire you. You have a disability."

DALE BROWN
Washington, D.C.

Mapmaker, mapmaker

You have said it twice—that you want Cyprus partitioned ["Tilting at Windmills," November]. What do you know about Cyprus anyway besides the "Greek hates Turk" stereotype? Have you been there? Do you know any of its history besides cliches?

Do you know for example that Greek and Turkish Cypriots lived peacefully on Cyprus for hundreds of years? Or do you know of Ibrahim Aziz's poetry—Bolunur mu hic (It cannot be dismembered). Let me roughly translate

The Washington Monthly

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for you one of his poems with the above title:

My brother
Our Country is not like
bread that you can cut it in two!
It is our country and it
cannot be dismembered.
How is it possible to cut up
our country when like brothers
we can all live within it.

MARIOS L. EVRIVIADES
Washington, D.C.

Dr. Evriviades is the press counselor of the embassy of the Republic of Cyprus.

Cyprus was partitioned in 1974. It's clear that the political meddling of Greece, Turkey, and the United States was far more responsible for that partition than were the Cypriots themselves. There were certainly minorities of nationalist fanatics on both sides of the ethnic divide, but the level of general hatred between Greeks and Turks was far less than that between, say, whites and blacks in Chicago. Perhaps the intervening years have hopelessly poisoned the relationship; I can't say. But given that Cyprus was in 1974 and is today no less a sovereign state than the U.S., your logic leads dangerously close to the conclusion that America itself should be partitioned, with blacks in one part, whites in another.

PAUL GLASTRIS
Chicago, Illinois

The editor replies:

I have been to Cyprus, and I can tell you that while I've also been to many countries in Africa, the Middle East, and Asia, I've never encountered worse hatred. A normally sweet and rational Greek or Turk starts frothing at the mouth when the other group is mentioned and it is suggested that its arguments have even the faintest merit. This is definitely not true in the case of normally sweet and rational blacks and whites in America.

Deconstructing JFK

You are right [about the Kennedy-Johnson debate, "Tilting at Windmills," December]. I was in the room.

CHALMERS M. ROBERTS
Bethesda, Maryland

Mr. Roberts covered the 1960 Democratic National Convention for The Washington Post.

I would like to offer another version of the Johnson-Kennedy debate at the 1960 convention.

I wandered into the auditorium and was told that the Texas delegation was caucusing, and that JFK had been invited to debate. The Texans had the prominent downfront seats and seemed to outnumber all others present.

The meeting opened with Johnson addressing an empty chair on the stage and lamenting the ". . .junior senator from Massachusetts" 's failure to come and debate important issues.

I later learned that the Kennedy advisers, sensing a trap, had decided that it would be bad strategy for Jack to appear before a hostile audience and, watching TV in Suite 8315, they were as surprised as LBJ when Jack walked onto the stage.

A somewhat upset Johnson introduced Kennedy graciously. Kennedy took the microphone and proceeded to say nice things about Texas and their favorite son, interrupted frequently by appreciative applause, not quite what LBJ had had in mind. Kennedy's final line, ". . .the greatest majority leader the Senate has ever had, and we need to keep him there," permitted him to leave to a standing ovation, before the loyal Texans realized what they were cheering.

ROBERT C. COAKLEY
Flandreau, South Dakota

Obstacle courses

Your tortured justification for accepting the radar detector ad ["Letters," December] prompts me to ask if you would accept the black and white Carlton ad that says, "If you smoke please try Carlton"?

BILL SCHNIRRING
New York, New York

The editor replies:

Yes, we would. We draw the line at ads that glamorize such practices as smoking.

Would you have called the males enduring the training in *An Officer and a Gentleman* "boys" ["Tilting at Windmills," November]? Then why was it not that *woman* [who] finally made it over the obstacle course? As you stated early in the column, you're not likely to be accused of being a card-carrying member of NOW.

MARSHA S. JACKSON
Washington, D.C.

'You're off base'

I agree with you that newspapers that take cigarette ads and rail about smoking-related deaths have a lot of explaining to do ["The Powers That Be Lobbying," December]. But you're off base in questioning why I failed to say so in an article on an entirely different subject.

My article was about tobacco's outreach to the scrappy underdogs: black, Hispanic, women's, and labor organizations. Last time I checked, media biggees were not part of this group.

To your everlasting credit, you have starved for years while publications with more wealth and less scruples raked in the tobacco lucre. But I think, as a result, you've grown a little bit obsessed.

MYRON LEVIN
Los Angeles, California

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Justice Rehnquist and the Constitution

Sue Davis

This analysis of the decision making of William H. Rehnquist from the beginning of his tenure as an Associate Justice of the United States Supreme Court in 1971 until he was nominated to be Chief Justice in 1986 presents an interesting new perspective on the Burger Court's most conservative member. The common assessment of Rehnquist's career on the Supreme Court is that he has tried to put his own political agenda into effect—deciding as he wishes and justifying it later. Davis disputes that view through insightful, stimulating analysis of his opinions, his votes, and his public speeches.

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William W. Keller

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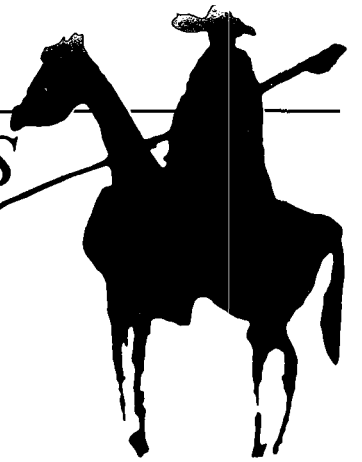
TILTING AT WINDMILLS



One reason the crime wave in the District of Columbia goes unchecked is that a citizen who calls the police and says he sees a drug deal or some other crime being committed across the street knows that the cops will arrive at *his* door, point across the street, and say, "You mean those guys over there," in full view of those guys. . . .

With the salary of federal judges rising to $135,000 a year, a matter taxpayers might want to contemplate is the amount of energy expended by these jurists. *The Recorder*, a legal newspaper in San Francisco, recently studied how long it took judges on the Ninth Circuit to produce opinions. The four hardest workers took under a hundred days each. But the average for all judges was 147 days. Seven took more than 200 days, one 307. . . .

This year HUD will build only 5,000 public housing units in the entire country. The waiting list for public housing in New York City alone is 190,000. But HUD is building a swimming pool for Island Park, New York, a middle-class community, located less than one mile from one of the best public beaches on Long Island. Those among you whose souls are irretrievably warped by cynicism may suspect that the fact that Senator Alfonse D'Amato lives in Island Park has something to do with this development. . . .

Speaking of cynicism, you may have felt that I fell victim to it when, in reporting a few months back on a study in *The Journal of the American Medical Association* that suggested loss of sleep did not impair the performance of all those overworked interns and residents, I noted that this finding seemed to reflect the self-interest of the medical profession in perpetuating the practice of brutalizing its young.

But last month there was a long report in *The New York Times* headlined, "For Those Who Have Lost Sleep, the First Casualty Is Creativity." One night of lost sleep results in loss of spontaneity, flexibility, and originality. With a second night's loss, things get worse, with a significant decline in ability to deal with multiple-choice questions or with emergencies.

Our solution to this problem is to have all hospital staff physicians work one or two nights a year so that the interns and residents can sleep. Most hospitals have more than enough doctors to handle such a schedule. Suburban Hospital outside Washington, for example, has 925. . . .

There were, of course, many reasons why *My Fair Lady* was the most successful Broadway musical of the fifties, including the songs of Alan Jay Lerner and Frederick Loewe and the performances of Rex Harrison and Julie Andrews. But one important reason has not, to the best of my knowledge, been explored. It is that, in saying that class could be taught, that Liza Doolittle

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could learn to be a lady, it answered a hunger among many Americans who aspired to move up socially. Now they could do so. They could learn the ropes. Class was no longer conferred by birth alone.

As Jason DeParle's article (page 10) explains, the fifties were the time when moving up in class became possible for a large number of Americans because of the postwar prosperity and the education that millions acquired through the GI Bill. But could they? The play replied with a joyful yes—if Higgins could teach Liza, someone could teach them. For most of the upwardly mobile of that era, their Professor Higgins was *The New Yorker* magazine, which, with some help from *Harper's Bazaar* and *Vogue*, taught them important lessons of style and taste. He was also the trip to Europe where you learned about painting and sculpture and architecture, about the tailors on Saville Row, the shops on Rue St. Honore and Via Condotti, and the difference between a burgundy and a bordeaux. Now you could be accepted at the Ball just as Liza was.

What has been wrong with this thirst for acceptance was first explored in the columns of this magazine by Suzannah Lessard in 1975 (see page 33), but it was suggested by another fifties musical, the film *Funny Face*. Audrey Hepburn is won away from a doctrine called Empaticalism and its leading guru, Professor Flastre (remember—existentialism and Sartre), by Fred Astaire, a fashion photographer modeled after Richard Avedon, who was as chic as you could get in the fifties.

The pursuit of style triumphs over the pursuit of wisdom. In the case of the professor, his wisdom was as phony as he was, so Hepburn's choice was right. But when the wisdom is real, the choice in favor of the chic is wrong. And since the fifties, far too many intelligent Americans have made that choice, worrying more about what's in and what's out than about how to lead a decent life, have some fun but also be thoughtful about others and try to do something constructive, something that might make a difference.

Spy, like *Funny Face*, is highly entertaining and often right on target in its exposure of the Flastres of this world. But it is wrong to the extent it contributes to an intellectual climate in which the fear of ridicule inhibits or distracts people from thinking about and doing the things that count. . . .

Speaking of fashion, the latest in mineral water is headed east from California. It may smell moldy and taste musty, but it costs $4 a glass because it's flavored with the essence of the rarest of fungi. If you'd like to try it, the product's name is Mendocino Truffle Mineral Water. . .

In case you didn't know the hidden angles behind that $135,000 salary for congressmen and the large increases for other top officials:

They were recommended by a commission whose chairman, Lloyd Cutler, is a Washington lawyer whose firm's business consists in considerable part of lobbying the very people he is giving the raises to; and the comparison the commission's propaganda used to justify the raises is that between the purchasing power of

"STOP THEM DAMN PICTURES"

That's what "Boss" Tweed demanded when he saw the handwriting on the Hall (Tammany, that is). But the pictures didn't stop. "Boss" Tweed met his maker in the Ludlow Street Jail and Thomas Nast put bitingly eloquent political cartoons squarely and permanently in the middle of American political life. Tweed aside, we think Emerson had it right when he said, *"Caricatures are often the truest history of the times."*

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congressional salaries in 1970, and today. The catch is that congressional salaries, adjusted for inflation, were at their highest level in 1970. The $42,500 Congress got in 1970 was worth $124,395 in 1987 dollars. So when we were told how bad off the poor congressmen were compared to 1970, no one was telling us just how well off the fellows were then. Also not emphasized by the commission were the congressional perks that the rest of us have to pay for—from minor but nice items like free parking, free health clubs, and free stationery, to big tickets like health care and life insurance and one of the most generous pension plans in the nation....

GIVE THE TIME OF YOUR LIFE.

Be a volunteer.

American Red Cross

In contrast to the greed in Washington, there is the story of Bob Kelley, the city administrator of Kingsbury, California. In the past two years he has refused to accept four pay increases that he had a right to take. But he says his salary of $40,000 a year is all he needs to live on. That's true of a lot of other public employees (did you know that more than 300,000 federal civil servants are now earning more than Kelley does?) who self-righteously demand much more....

The two big unanticipated items in the federal budget for the next few years will be cleaning up the damage from nuclear plants and bailing out savings and loans. To all my conservative friends, I would like to point out that these expenses, amounting to at least $200 billion, could have been avoided by tough regulation.

But while I'm campaigning for re-regulation in the many areas where it's needed, I should make it clear that I realize some regulations are stupid—like when the District of Columbia refused to let some ministers open a ten-bed home for the homeless because it lacked a fire ladder or when New York City officials refused to let a small restaurant open until it spent $100,000 on facilities for the handicapped. Obviously rules and requirements that make sense for large businesses should not be used to crush struggling philanthropists or entrepreneurs, and the foolish officials and laws that fail to make sensible distinctions should be subjected to unremitting ridicule....

The Washington Post has a weekly health magazine that's truly outstanding. (One wonders how its weekly business magazine can be so bad—most of its articles read like Chamber of Commerce press releases.) Other media performers I've been meaning to recognize are David Margolick, author of the "At the Bar" column in *The New York Times*, for his remarkably perceptive coverage of the culture of the law, and Washington television stations for their fine investigators Jack Cloherty (WRC) and Mark Feldstein (WUSA) and consumer reporters Lea Thompson (WRC) and Roberta Baskin (WJLA)....

One cause of prison overcrowding that could be eliminated overnight is the 20,000 inmates who are more than 55 years old. These people are well past the crime-prone years—the teens and twenties—and most could be released without any danger to the community. One of them is Jean Harris, now in her late sixties, for whose release I have campaigned in the past. Certainly she killed Dr. Tarnower and should have been punished. But it was a crime of passion, not the kind of cold-blooded murder for which I of course concede extremely severe punishment is justified. She has been imprisoned for eight years. Surely that's enough punishment for an old lady who is obviously not going to shoot anyone else or commit any other crime. So why not let her out to make

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room in prison for someone who really is a threat to society?. . .

Another of the deregulatory triumphs of the Reagan administration is that the National Transportation Safety Board has fewer people working for it than it did in 1982, even though it is investigating more accidents. Now, I want to ask my conservative friends, do you really feel so safe up there in one of those ancient 727s with its rivets about to pop out or in one of those flimsy commuter planes with untrained pilots that you are really convinced that we don't need a tough NTSB?. . .

Tax incentives are not always bad. Those specifically designed to encourage entrepreneurs and new plants have long been advocated by this magazine. Another we liked was the one, enacted in 1981, to encourage the rehabilitation of historic buildings. It saved many wonderful old structures that otherwise were fated for the wrecker's ball. But the incentive was slashed by the Tax Reform Act of 1986. The result, according to Kirstin Downey of *The Washington Post*, has been that the number of historic preservation projects has plunged by two-thirds. . . .

There are a lot of things that are going to cost the government a lot of money that don't appear in the budget. One of these is the loan guarantees made by agencies like the Farmers Home Administration, the Export-Import Bank, the Veterans Administration, and the Small Business Administration. To give you an idea of the extent of the problem, the total budget for the coming year is $1.1 trillion. The total amount of outstanding loan guarantees not included in the figure is $745 billion. And to give you an idea of how much of that $745 billion could turn out to be money the taxpayers have to come up with, the General Accounting Office estimates that $36 billion of the Farmers Home Administration total of $90 billion is lost. . . .

A couple of months ago David Broder wrote a column arguing that it was wrong for people to go back and forth between journalism and government. I disagree. The most glaring deficiency of Washington reporters is their lack of inside knowledge of the government. Only a handful have worked in the bureaucracy, and they should be praised for it instead of being condemned. Certainly we should be suspicious of people who might use a high post in government to gain a similar position in journalism or vice versa. But the experience that is most valuable—at the lower and middle levels of the bureaucracy, where you find out what's really going on—should be sought by journalists and encouraged by their employers. It's good to know what you're writing about. . . .

The year before California increased the speed limit on rural interstates to 65 miles per hour, there were 1,690 accidents resulting in injury or death on those roads. The year after, there were 1,943. Worse still, the number of fatal accidents in which speed was the primary factor jumped more than three-fold. . . .

Senator Bob Graham of Florida has a practice I very much admire. He devotes what he calls "work days" to performing a variety of real jobs to learn firsthand about the life and problems of his constituents. In December, his 222nd such day since he started ten years ago while a member of the Florida legislature, was spent in a Florida soup kitchen feeding the hungry and homeless. He has been, among other things, a factory worker, a citrus grove hand, a public school teacher, a maintenance worker in a public housing project, and a college financial aid counselor. We all bemoan the insulation of life in Washington. Graham has found an excellent way of overcoming it. . . .

—*Charles Peters*

Thank You,
CHARLIE PETERS,
for 20 years of Tidbits and Outrages, Memos of the Month, and Tilting at Windmills, and best wishes for many more years of hell-raising, enlightening journalism.
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The smart magazine that makes smart people nervous about their status

Spy Anxiety

by Jason DeParle

Not long ago *The New York Times* Sunday real estate section ran an article about a gentrifying neighborhood in Brooklyn. The *Times* quoted one "Julian Frank, a freelance art director unhappily sharing a crowded flat in Manhattan," on the proper weighing of the factors, pro and con, of moving to a decent place in Prospect Heights: "Once you've lived in New York awhile, you know there are a lot of cheap places to live, but there aren't a lot of cheap acceptable places, in the sense that you can't live there—you can't tell people you live there, see? It's not acceptable. A while ago this area was not acceptable, but now it is. It's crazy, but it's New York."

What would happen to Julian Frank if he moved to an area that was not acceptable? It's not too hard to conjure up his worries—not too hard, because you've probably had similar worries yourself. There's a party, let's say in a loft with a view of the river, the kind of party that makes you feel like a winner for being in attendance, full of interesting, successful, attractive people making bright talk. Let's say in Julian's case that a lot of art directors, illustrators, and photographers are there, so that there's a kind of automatic career-building charge in the air. At one point somebody says, "Hey, whatever happened to old Julian? I haven't seen him around lately." There's a moment of silence. Then someone else says, "I heard he moved to Rego Park—that's in Queens. I thought about calling him the other day, but he's in a different area code." The group laughs appreciatively and gaily moves onto another subject.

It's a chilling prospect. The fear of making some gaffe that will cause consignation to a dreary outer circle of society is one that grips not just Manhattan but a vast portion of middle-class America, particularly from mid-middle class on up, and it seems to be getting worse. Is my child in the right kindergarten? Am I drinking the right scotch? Have I seen the right art exhibits? To paraphrase Ronald Reagan, do you feel less nervous about your place in the world than you did ten years ago? Probably not.

This pervasive status anxiety is what social scientists like to call an unintended consequence—a consequence of the great democratization of American society since the Depression. The engine of class leveling was the combination of economic prosperity and a more equitable distribution of income. And with the passage of the GI Bill, a college education, once the exclusive coin of the well-to-do, became common currency. The post-war boom that brought good jobs at good wages, home ownership, and college educations to the masses made snobbery, even in the conformist 1950s, seem doomed. Pick at random any book from the shelf of the liberal-consensus school of the 1940s and 1950s, and you'll find the confident belief that snobbery was a peculiarity of the Gilded Age WASP economic plutocracy, a custom fast being crowded out of modern life.

Here in 1952 is Frederick Lewis Allen in *The Big Change*:

"What was striking about the social pattern of

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Photo by Charles Kennedy

1900, as we look back upon it today, was that in most communities it was much cleaner and simpler, the stratifications more generally recognized, and especially that they were generally taken much more seriously than they are today. . . .The rich man smokes the same sort of cigarettes as the poor man, shaves with the same sort of razor, uses the same sort of telephone, vacuum cleaner, radio, and TV set, has the same sort of lighting and heating equipment in his house, and so on indefinitely. . . .Nor should we overlook the immense influence of mass circulation magazines, the movies, the radio, and television in imposing upon Americans of all income levels the same patterns of emulation: in other words, making them want to be the same sort of people. . . .In short, the social distance between the extremes of American society is shrinking. . . .The pattern is kaleidoscopic, to the confusion of organized snobbery."

Mrs. Astor's tenure

As anyone can attest who, say, has scanned the ads in an upscale magazine recently, America has shown great ingenuity in resisting the classlessness that Allen saw as its fate. In retrospect, the harbinger of today's social jitters was the emergence of what New York gossip columnists of the forties dubbed "Cafe Society"—a free-floating group composed of legatees of Old Society, minor members of the European nobility, actors, writers, artists, entertainers, publicists, fashion designers, sports stars, and publishers who spent their evenings in New York nightclubs such as the Stork Club and El Morocco. What was new about Cafe Society was that, since it wasn't based on lavish private entertaining, it didn't require wealth or power as a precondition to membership. Instead, it was necessary merely to be attractive, amusing, sophisticated, glamorous, or well known, and it included, oddly enough, those who were known simply for being known. The thirst for publicity was so strong that debutantes such as Corbina Wright Jr. and Brenda Frazier were reputed to have press agents. Old Society lingered on, of course, and being born into its numbers was still a great advantage; the publication of the *Celebrity Register* didn't replace the *Social Register* as much as signal that other paths to status were possible. But since birth meant less than it had previously, membership in Cafe Society was both more open and more insecure—through some misfortune in your career, you could be drummed out.

Cafe Society, though amply chronicled in the press, was tiny, a curiosity item in the broad context of a more democratic American society. But its ethos spread steadily, with glittering mixes of people from different fields uniting much more by wit, style, taste, and renown than by commonality of financial and ethnic credentials. This social principle later got a huge boost during the presidency of John F. Kennedy, who had put in his time at the Stork Club in the years following World War II and brought Cafe Society style to Washington.

Meanwhile, back in the fifties, the trends that Frederick Lewis Allen wrote about were creating an ever-larger class of people who were educated,

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ambitious, prosperous but not spectacularly rich, and, compared to past generations, unusually mobile across the old boundaries of geography and social position. They were people who wanted some kind of elite status but for whom the role of robber baron was unattainable and that of the Babbitt-like local burgher was unappealing. The dream of this group was to join a relatively large national class that can best be described, oxymoronically, as a democratic aristocracy: a distinct "better class of people," in which membership was open to anyone regardless of the circumstances of his or her birth.

Once you got above a certain upper-middle-class floor, money was not the crucial factor for determining membership in this new meritocratic elite (though it's more important). Nor was the possession of a college degree, since ever more people had them. The *kind* of college degree became more important (was it, in today's parlance, "a hot college"?), as did other credentials, job titles, and the criteria of taste, style, and celebrity. Since membership among the new elite was a less secure commodity, taste badges took on new importance as a means of maintaining status—Mrs. Astor had tenure, Sally Quinn doesn't. The relative rise in equality that Frederick Lewis Allen thought would eliminate the differences in choice of razor, cigarette, and home lighting instead made those choices all the more crucial for those eager to make the grade. How else to set oneself apart? Institutions that could help people qualify for the democratic aristocracy thrived. (This is why Stanley H. Kaplan, the Monarch of Meritocracy, is a rich man today.) At the style-taste-fame end of the credentials spectrum, no institution has been more influential than the magazine publishing industry.

Wally Cleaver's dad

Frederick Lewis Allen wrote about an explosion in mass-circulation magazines (there were more magazines with circulations over a million in 1952 than there are today) and assumed that they would promote snobbery-free mass tastes. But television drew the bulk of national mass-market advertising away from magazines, and most of the big slicks (*Look*, *Colliers*, *The Saturday Evening Post*, and *Life*) died or faded away. The magazine industry learned that to survive it had to deliver a targeted audience of the affluent who couldn't be reached efficiently through television. Its economic base became advertising not from Proctor & Gamble but from expensive liquor, fancy cars, and high fashion—all status symbols that were available to many more people than earlier class badges, such as mansions and polo ponies, had been. This served

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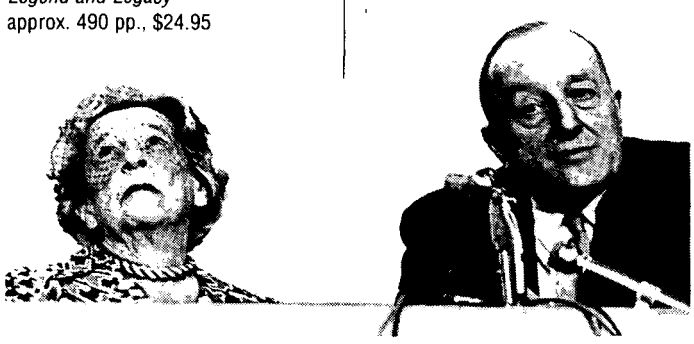
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the interests not only of the producers but of the consumers too: these were precisely the kinds of taste flags that the members of the new democratic aristocracy were eager to wave.

Virtually the only magazines that have thrived since the fifties have been the ones that reach specialized audiences. One category of these, so-called "buff books" for hobbyists interested in fishing or golf or computers, are fairly snobbery-neutral. Most of the rest have been snobbery-enhancing. In the 1950s, the pioneer and unrivaled giant in this field was *The New Yorker*, whose high seriousness had inherent snob appeal, whose cartoons and "newsbreaks" displayed the suave manner of those in the know, and whose ads for everything from shirts to soda water have long instructed readers on the nuances of sophistication. The magazine's pronouncements on art, literature, theater, and even politics then defined respectable opinion virtually by fiat. Of course *The New Yorker* was far too genteel to be explicit in its lessons of cultivation. As status hunger soared, the market for more direct instruction in the ways of taste expanded, and other publications arose to fill it.

There came the city magazines, which, under the influence of Clay Felker at *New York*, focused on chronicling trends in dining and shopping and the fortunes of the local celebrity classes. Newspapers expanded their society pages into sections with names like "Style" and devoted them to following what's hot and what's not. (The conversion in nomenclature from "society" to "style" revealed much about the emergence of the new, sophisticated elite.) Other publications followed suit. There are the "shelter" magazines, which, beginning with the great economic success in the seventies of *Architectural Digest*, have increasingly moved away from their former Hints-from-Heloise style and toward depicting the homes of the rich. There are the proliferating fashion magazines, which have followed the transition in the high-end clothing business from custom tailoring for the rich to the manufacture of expensive ready-to wear fashions for the upper middle class. In the fifties and sixties, even a magazine like *Playboy*, now in decline, always had a generous element of teaching the reader how to dress and behave like a "gentleman" in order to nail down his place in the open society of postwar America. Television was slow to understand the need for taste instruction but began playing catch-up in the seventies with the appearance of upper-crust British accents on public TV. Today, even the characters on network programs such as "thirtysomething" make casual reference to *The New Republic* (and Frank Lloyd Wright's Robie house) to show they're in the know. Imagine Wally Cleaver's dad reading *The New Republic* and you'll see how far the market for displays of sophistication has advanced.

Back in the Cafe Society days a familiar minor figure was the arbiter of fashion who would issue best-dressed and worst-dressed lists and pronouncements on what was in and out of style. This exercise has spread fantastically over the past decade. Conde Nast's *Vanity Fair*, which is considered one of the great magazine success stories of the late 1980s, has brought the snob appeal and taste dictation of the company's other magazines to traditional general-interest subject matter. The list of what's In and what's Out has become a staple not just of magazines but of the newspaper lifestyle sections as well, and perhaps reached a pinnacle of sorts on New Year's Day when an In and Out list hit the Sunday op-ed page of *The New York Times*. (The *op-ed* page.) You know the lists—the *Times* says that Mel Gibson, large muffins, and Sante Fe are In; Michael Jackson, croissants, and the Hamptons are Out. They can make irresistible reading material and are sometimes intended and received in a tongue-in-cheek fashion. But they also induce an undercurrent of unease, connoting as they do the idea that fashion changes so fast that anyone's grip on it is necessarily tenuous.

The In side of the In-and-Out list occupies a higher moral ground than the Out side. In is trendy, but

From one alternative voice to another, *The Washington Times* salutes your many contributions to the nation's dominant media culture. Charlie's Angels, now stationed in key positions throughout the country, have given the lie to Oscar Wilde, who said that the difference between literature and journalism is that journalism is unreadable and literature is not read. *The Washington Monthly* is the English equivalent of sushi—bait. Many more happy birthdays.

Arnaud de Borchgrave
Editor-in-Chief
The Washington Times

The Washington Times

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Out is both trendy and a put-down, meant to encourage the reader to feel disdain and also a measure of fear. What if something about me is declared Out? Insults prey on the mind far more than praise does. (As a technique, In-and-Out needn't be confined to a list but can be sprinkled liberally throughout a magazine with parenthetical asides and between-the-lines intent.) If you were to attach electrodes to readers to measure their nervousness levels, magazines that concentrate on In, such as *Vogue* and *New York*, would register much lower readings than magazines like *New York Woman* or *M*, which mix praise with withering scorn for the tasteless. One put-down repository is *New York Woman*'s Loose Lips column, which includes sections with titles like "Man at His Worst" and "Dress to Regress," turning simple In boosters like *Esquire* ("Man at His Best") and John Malloy (*Dress for Success*) on their heads. Loose Lips tackles such questions as whether a New York woman should seek a Filofax as a Christmas gift and warns that the operative concept is, "Can you stand to be so late in the game that veterans may mock your binder for its pristine leather?"

> Imagine Wally Cleaver's dad reading *The New Republic* and you'll see how far the market for displays of sophistication has advanced.

The essence of Queens

The magazine that New York is most obsessed with right now is *Spy*. On a percentage-of-content basis, *Spy* is more fully devoted to the put-down than any other American periodical. It's a giant In-and-Out list with the In side left out. The fact that its put-downs are usually clever and often deserved makes them all the more intimidating. Then again, its editors have been practicing. In 1980 *Spy* co-founder-to-be Kurt Andersen published *The Real Thing*, a book-length In-and-Out list that showed that by the age of 26 he had given such things much thought. Budweiser, Dr. J., and the French film *Jules and Jim* were in; Miller, Kareem, and *A Man and a Woman* were out. Oak was in. "Red cedar is a faddish California upstart. . . .Teak and ebony are just too precious. Redwoods are freaks. Balsa is retarded. Rosewood is too womanish, and maple—sugar maple, anyway—too manly. Pine is prosaic. . . ." Doc Watson was In; Joni Mitchell was Out, "but that doesn't discourage sensitive college-educated young women with two or more cats from buying and worshipping Joni's deadpan Zeitgeist. And these fans—frizzy-haired, herb-tea-swilling children's book illustrators all—know every word of every song. And as if the record-jacket transcriptions weren't enough, *they play the records*." And so forth.

Spy is much smarter, funnier, and vastly more original than its competitors. It acts as a social Geiger counter of sorts, engineered to detect the sham within levels of (mostly New York) society that range roughly from Tama Janowitz to Donald Trump. *Spy* can find the worm in most anyone's apple and is particularly adept at documenting backscratching, feuding, social climbing, and other aspects of career maintenance. It runs a Liz Smith Tote Board that lists the number of gossip column appearances per celebrity. It watches authors swap gushes over each other's books. ("Brilliantly clear-sighted," says Paul Theroux of Graham Greene. "Compulsive reading," says Graham Greene of Paul Theroux.) *Spy* prides itself on its rigorous reporting and is full of odd facts that are meant to embarrass and do. Noting the number of people who claimed credit for the popular I♥NY slogan, the magazine sought the real phrase-coiner and found a vicious battle of self-promotion, with one alleged author calling another "a lying piece of shit," to *Spy*'s and its readers' glee.

The delight of much of *Spy* exists in its sheer nastiness, unburdened by higher social purpose. Still, it's possible to imagine such a purpose lurking behind some of the attacks. The reports on who at *The New York Times* is sleeping with whom (sometimes literally), compelling as mere gossip, might be defended as an extension of the journalistic principle that powerful institutions deserve examination. The magazine's attack on Eric Breindel, the editorial page editor of *The New York Post*, was widely criticized for being excessively nasty, and it was. Still, there was more than just nastiness at work. The article showed how, with the right Rolodex, a bright guy from Harvard could overcome most everything—including, in Breindel's case, a bust for possession of heroin. "We champion the underdog and bite the ankle of the overdog," one *Spy* editor has said.

That's not to say that one finishes an issue of *Spy* with the glow of democracy upon the skin. The hives of status anxiety are the likelier result. The magazine's prose is powered chiefly by the mastery

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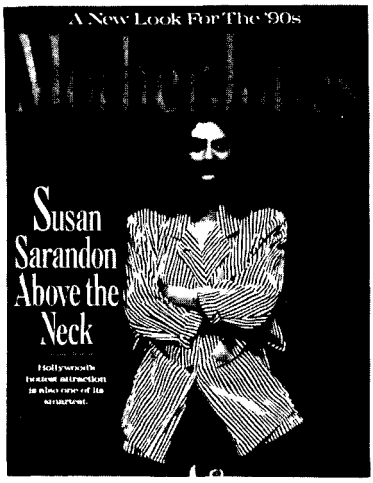

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Spy's relentless and snide exhibitions of taste leave the feel that its ultimate purpose is to elevate itself to Masters of the Taste Universe, gatekeepers of the meritocracy, spreading angst among its earnest aspirants

of put-downs, and the put-downs are based on the mastery (or alleged mastery) of taste. Emily Post isn't nearly as fastidious. However worthy *Spy*'s attacks on the "overdog," the magazine's final effect is to provide its readers (average household income: $87,500) with plenty of occasion to worry about their own place in the extremely status-fluid, taste-based world.

The first issue's treatment of George Steinbrenner sets the tone: "The hair—a sort of molded Rotarian Prince Valiant cut—is almost enough by itself, but then you have his blue American-made clothes, stretched across his steakhouse belly. . . ." There, in one phrase alone, are the makings of quite an Out list. Skipping momentarily past the hair (since with my $87,500 job I am sophisticated enough to avoid Rotary clubs), I nonetheless begin to itch when I reach the Steinbrenner clothes rack. *American-made* clothes? Are they Out? *Blue*—has that been banned too? I return from my nervous mental tour of my closet to Steinbrenner's steakhouse belly and wonder if it's the steak or simply the paunch that's the problem. Perhaps I'd fare better with redfish tonight (though the problems there will later emerge). I haven't finished a single *Spy* sentence, but I begin to fear that there's much about me, too, that is vulnerable to ridicule.

It's no accident that one of *Spy*'s standard advertisements for itself doesn't so much tout the magazine as mock a dorky, essence-of-Queens guy with sideburns and a too-wide polyester collar, or that its first cover featured a smarmy guy in a disco pose, headlined "Jerks." These are *Spy*'s straw men, with whom it lures its sophisticated readers for a laugh. But when *Spy* publishes its annual list of the 100 most "annoying, alarming, and appalling people, places, and things"—and includes among them such former icons of chic as *The New Yorker* and (oh, no!) blackened redfish—it's not clear who will laugh last. *Spy* invites its readers in for a good snicker at someone else and leaves them wondering whether someone isn't snickering at them. In this nervous meritocratic world in which we Julian Franks live, that fear can be debilitating. It also boosts circulation.

Omaha toes

To watch how this works, it's useful to divide *Spy* put-downs into three categories. The magazine's renown, of course, comes from its put-downs of the Trumpclass, the overly rich or powerful and obnoxious, in which *Spy* typically includes Leona Helmsley, Ivan Boesky, Ed Koch, Abe Rosenthal, Cardinal O'Connor, Al Neuharth, Rupert Murdoch, and Mort Zuckerman. But *Spy* has also opened a second line of attack against what might be thought of as the *lumpenmiddleclass*, a group of allegedly crude unsophisticates that the magazine has defined as including people who drive Camaros, wear Florsheim shoes, go to dinner theater, listen to music by Grand Funk Railroad or Cher, live in Winnipeg, central New Jersey, or Queens, and work as tool-and-die salesmen. (You know the type.) While the typical *Spy* attack on, say, Donald Trump is a frontal assault, the magazine's put-downs of the middle class more frequently take the form of gratuitous asides, dismissive nonsequiturs meant to establish good taste. When, for example, a reader wrote in with a question about the musical, "Carrie," *Spy* replied, *apropos* of nothing, "We missed Carrie—we were seeing a Bucks County dinner-theater pro-

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duction of Moose Murders that night." In other words, "We pause in this broadcast to assure our readers of our sophistication." Theater, of course, is not the issue here, whether on-Broadway, off-Broadway, or in the Bucks County high-school auditorium. While many dinner theaters offer overpriced and bad shows, others are perfectly harmless, a few are pretty good, and together they give out-of-work but talented actors a place to perform. So, why go to extra effort to piss on them all—other than to flaunt one's credentials of taste? *Spy* isn't concerned with bad theater but rather with advertising that it knows what people of taste are supposed to consider bad theater.

Similarly, shoes aren't the issue when, speculating on the demise of Times Square, *Spy* pauses to observe that at least it might "make Florsheim shoes harder to come by." Wondering what evil was accruing by way of Florsheim shoes, I went down to a nearby outlet and tried a few pairs on. They *looked* good. Sliding around on that thick shoe-store carpet, they felt pretty good, too. Hand-stitched and leather-lined, they probably would have worn good—just as good as, say, a pair of Peel's. If I'd had the cash—$205 for the top-line loafer—I might have bought them. Why, then, the *Spy* disdain? *Spy*'s problem with Florsheim is that there are too many guys in Omaha sticking their toes into a pair and thinking that with $200 loafers they've arrived. Anything on an Omaha In list is an immediate *Spy* target.

Spy's fussy lesson plans in the ways of taste, of course, hold great appeal for the magazine's advertisers, who stand to profit by the great upper-middle-class angst over what to eat, wear, drive, drink, read, say, and do. In the taste game's early days, status-conscious advertisers could content themselves simply by trumpeting the In side of the list, which is to say their products. What young *New Yorker* reader, eager to establish himself as a person of some sophistication, would have been caught without Schweppes in the cabinet or Hathaway in the drawer? Ogilvy, Benson, & Mather, pioneers on the advertising end of the taste game (with clients like Rolls Royce and the British Travel & Holidays Association), enriched themselves, *The New Yorker*, and Schweppes by figuring out how to get enough people to pay a premium for the same bottle of tonic water that Canada Dry sold much cheaper. One can imagine the plotters' delight when they stumbled across Commander Whitehead, the Schweppes executive with just the right aristocratic look. "Jesus, Whitehead, we could use *you*," they must have exclaimed, before pressing him into duty as a symbol of suave carbonation.

These days, with the efforts at class definition a bit more rigorous, even advertisers go in for Out. "DEFINITELY NOT US," proclaims a series of ads in *Spy* for, of all things, *US* magazine that display members of the *lumpenmiddleclass* in the most unflattering poses. They sit around the RV park in one not-*US* ad wearing T-shirts and housecoats, looking dumb and vaguely menacing; a box of Ritz crackers is open on the table. This apparently is *US* magazine's way of saying that it, too, caters to people of good taste (all consumers of Carr's table water crackers here), and it's no wonder it chose *Spy* as one place to make the pitch. *Spy* is a bullhorn through which its editors keep screaming that all sorts of tasteless people are "definitely not us."

Angie angst

The third and most important category of *Spy* put-down focuses neither on Donald Trump nor on the Ritz-eaters in the RV park but on rivals for power and prestige within the great American meritocracy. Informally speaking, any society in which people make it on their own is a meritocracy, and on that level Donald Trump would qualify. But the group that most concerns *Spy* is the meritocracy in a much more specific sense—a professional class that grew from the opportunities of postwar America, and is governed by a series of elaborate if unofficial institutions meant to parcel out success in a "fair" way, along the lines of an unspoken code. For the American meritocrat, life, until age 40 or so anyway, is an intense race through such institutions, which might include SATs, admissions offices, law school, law review, clerkship, the associates program, and, finally, partnership. Playing by these rules, many (though of course not all) meritocrats also adhere to unofficial and rather arbitrary rules of taste—the right clothes, car, wine, and so forth—which they rarely see as arbitrary or snobbish but consider part of the just system by which the right people display sophistication and reap life's rewards. Since a violation of the taste code can threaten one's place in the meritocracy, a rapt, nervous attention frequently is

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"Spy's Graydon Carter [second from right]—chic in Tom Wolfe's clothing," from ad in *Vogue*.

accorded to matters of In and Out.

Spy represents a distillation of meritocratic values, and, to its credit, the magazine has even mocked itself over the incumbent angst. Poking fun at yourself is a good thing to do, and, in that regard at least, more publications could stand to follow *Spy*'s lead. "Fear brings us here [to New York] and keeps us here, doesn't it?" the magazine asks. "First the fear that we might have to spend a life in Decatur or Schenectady or Wahoo. . . if you didn't go to private school in Manhattan you came from a farm or its moral equivalent. . . .We have certain kinds of fears that we may be able to admit to ourselves—having an uncool job, not getting a place on the Vineyard, being rejected by the Century Association and the Milkbar. . . . It's all part of the price New York forces us to ante up to gain access to the trough." While giving *Spy* credit for the ability to tease itself, the reader might be forgiven the suspicion that these may be the most earnest words the magazine has spoken. Not long ago, a lobbying campaign by Kurt Anderson paid off with an invitation to join—guess where?—the Century Association, an exclusive Manhattan club. And there, last month, was his co-editor, Graydon Carter, not at the Vineyard or the Milkbar but posing for *Vogue*—"chic in Tom Wolfe's clothing," the caption informed. No trip back to Wahoo (or in Carter's case, Ottawa) for him. When the clothier Barney's went looking for symbols of its chic appeal, guess which founders of a monthly satirical magazine wound up in the ad pages of *The New York Times Magazine*? Bumping into the editors of *Spy* at the Century club, one begins to wonder whether the intent is to bite the ankle of the "overdog" as much as it is to join his table.

Spy's big gripe, finally, isn't that the underdog gets shafted but that some people out there are *cheating*. They're getting ahead without playing by the meritocracy's rules. Not so much Donald Trump—his wealth may rankle, but his crudity is a great consolation; meritocrats don't really want to be Donald Trump. But there are any number of lesser lights who have garnered more wealth, power, privilege, and fame than they've deserved—pushing ahead to the front of the Milkbar line: Jay McInerney, Paloma Picasso, Bianca Jagger, third-generation Kennedys, Julian Schnabel, Nancy Kissinger, and other targets of *Spy* scorn. "What we cannot accept," *Spy* says, and only partially in jest, "what causes us to wake up in the middle of the night sweating, is this: 'Why do good things happen to bad people?' "

At times, *Spy*'s pursuit of that question has led to good results. No publication is better at ferreting out undeserved fortune or fame. But *Spy*'s enforcement of the meritocratic code dissolves, finally, into an elaborate put-down game meant to signal superior taste to everyone—and most particularly to other members of the meritocracy, who worry greatly that they, too, will be exposed as lacking. (Even *Spy*'s name is a subtle flash of sophistication, referring to the magazine where the reporter in *The Philadelphia Story* worked.) The *Spy* men's relentless and snide exhibitions of taste leave the magazine with the feel that its ultimate purpose isn't to expose the sham but to elevate itself to the Masters of the Taste Universe, gatekeepers of the meritocracy, spreading angst among its earnest aspirants.

Spy's favorite way of fueling meritocratic anxiety is through attacks on a commodity that reached its chic peak, say, last Tuesday—or, even better, *next* Tuesday, to be ahead of the curve. *Spy* watches these parabolas of prestige closely, in order to be the first to detect a dip in velocity; any month's Out list might look astoundingly like the In list from a very recent issue of *New York*. Typically, the put-downs aren't criticisms accompanied by explanation; that would make them judgments. The offensiveness of the object of the put-down is meant to be self-evident, though it often is not.

Any reasonably competent meritocrat will know that Bess Myerson, Gary Hart, and Donald Trump belong on the Out list, but he or she has to follow the chic curve more closely to detect the sagging fortunes of Allan Bloom, the Beatles, Andrew Wyeth, Gloria Steinem, Liza Minnelli, people who talk about *Speed the Plow*, and people who say "Bonfire" when they mean *Bonfire of the Vanities*—all of them on *Spy* lists of things that appall. And what happens to those who don't follow closely? It might be that just last night I was telling a date (over blackened redfish) how much I enjoyed *The Closing of the American Mind* or the portraits of Helga and I now discover that I've said something terribly wrong. My command of the topography of chic is

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Bumping into the editors of *Spy* at the Century club, one begins to wonder whether the intent is to bite the ankle of the "overdog" as much as it is to join his table

lost. Reading *Spy*, mind you, doesn't tell me why I want to avoid mentioning *Speed the Plow*, only that I do.

What makes this game particularly tricky is that usually *Spy* is on to something—an element of hypocrisy or pretension worthy of exposure. *Spy*'s way of dealing with it, though, typically exacerbates one's nervousness, rather than dispels it. Noting that Mets's broadcaster Ralph Kiner uses a pretentious, book-lined set for his postgame show, *Spy* decided to take a peek and found the titles on the shelves ranged from *I Never Met a House Plant I Didn't Like* by Jerry Baker to Renata Adler's *Toward a Radical Middle*. Clearly, a put-down of the "literary lion" and "malapropian Hall of Famer" was in play, but the punch line left me guessing. Is the joke here simply the fake nature of the set? Is it the incongruity in the titles? Or is *Spy* implying that there's something wrong with *all* the volumes—that deep down, Renata Adler is just another House-Plant-I-Didn't-Like writer? Unsure, the reader is left with the seeds of worry that his own copy of *Toward a Radical Middle* may leave him similarly vulnerable. *Spy*'s guide to Regular Guy Manhattan was another puzzler. Okay, I see that *Spy* will give the yuppie no quarter, following him even to the rough-and-tumble side of town where he's posing as a regular. Hey, those *Spy*guys don't miss a trick, I think. But wait, what's this in their definition of Regular Guys—"Korean War vets...inveterate sharpies...misogynists"? I follow that misogynists and inveterate sharpies are bad, but I thought Korean War vets were good guys, M*A*S*H* and all that. Here's *Spy* to plant the thought that my grasp of such matters is tenuous indeed.

In some cases, the nature of the magazine's put-down is so arbitrary that a reader attempting to break the taste code can't because there simply is none. (Blue American-made clothes?) *Spy* groups together the following songs as examples of self-evidently crude recordings that topped the charts: Cher's "Half-Breed" (okay, I'm with you), Grand Funk Railroad's "We're an American Band" (mmmm, still following), and the Rolling Stones's "Angie" (you lost me). Until now I thought that the Rolling Stones were a great band (some might say the best rock band ever), and I've never seen anything objectionable to the song "Angie." In fact, until I read *Spy* it was among my favorite Stones songs. But now the impetus is nervously to remove it from my record rack before my error in good judgment becomes public.

It is here, finally, in the narrow borders of the meritocratic class, that the *Spy* put-down game has its most insidious effects. The snide, unexplained put-downs of New York bigshots (*Spy* ran a recent sidebar on Rudolph Guiliani's hair) confuse sneering with intelligence. The put-downs of the people at the Bucks County dinner theater reinforce the antidemocratic inclinations of the upper middle class, a group that needs no encouragement. But the kind of game that *Spy* plays with (mostly young) meritocratic minds is worst of all because of the roadblocks it erects to thought and action. When *Spy* holds up for ridicule the possession of a Renata Adler book, no reader can fail to see that there is surely something about him or her that could be made fun of in a similarly devastating way, and this kind of fear of embarrassment can become obsessive. Reading *Spy* has an inhibiting effect, and not just about wearing polyester shirts in loud patterns. The real message is that you can be laughed at for any position you take in life, so you'd better not take one at all.

The proliferation of the put-down, and *Spy*'s honing it to new levels of precision, gives the New York magazine world a new hierarchy. Gael Greene uses a restaurant review in *New York* magazine for an aside about how some people are sufficiently distasteful to put plaster-of-Paris pelicans in their yards; *Spy* then comes behind and finds that other people are sufficiently distasteful to read *New York*

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magazine. Joel L. Fleishman offers *Vanity Fair* readers advice on who's "well connected" in the foreign vineyard tour business, since planning trips is "tricky, even if you start with contacts." Then along comes *Spy* to put down Fleishman as "not a writer at all but a geeky academic. . . ." So imagine how miserable you'd feel if you were Sharon C. Larkins (who thanked *Vanity Fair* for Fleishman's advice, since "becoming an expert on wine is on my ever-lengthening list of things to do") and after planning this really well-connected tour of French chateaux you found out you'd been betrayed *by a geeky academic*!

Moo Cows and Wangdoodles

Or what if you've been taking literary cues from James Wolcott, a *Vanity Fair* reviewer who is no stranger himself to the put-down. (He recently wrote that neoliberals were misogynists who feared "having their weenies fed to the pencil sharpener. It's a collective case of castration anxiety.") Last spring, Wolcott wrote an intelligent, though typically abrasive, essay in *Vanity Fair* in which he criticized contemporary humor writing and gave *Spy* jokes a mixed review. *Spy* spat back by calling him "James 'Moo Cow' Wolcott," whatever that means, "literary America's number-one couch potato," whatever *that* means, and "a hyperventilating, overpaid contract writer," whatever that means, too. To top it off, *Spy* sneered that the average *Vanity Fair* reader was nothing but a "spoiled Barnard freshman who has a crush on Claus von Bulow." *Spy* didn't bother to explain why it disagreed with Wolcott, and, if "Moo Cow" refers to his weight, it's a particularly unenlightening way to disagree with someone.

Spy's put-downs are on perhaps their most prominent pedestal in the magazine's Review of Reviewers column, which is rarely anything more than an extended, disjointed, name-calling session. As usual, *Spy* had sound instincts on where to look for influence being used in questionable ways. But virtually every New York critic whom a young Manhattan professional aspiring to sophistication might have found occasion to admire—or quote at cocktail parties—(and many he has not) has been targeted as self-evidently crude, stupid, or perverted: John "Stupid" Rockwell; John "You Can Say that Again" Corry; David "the Dork" Denby; David "Wangdoodle" Edelstein; Clive "Wake me up when it's over" Barnes; Stephen "Short" Schiff; Roger Ebert, "the fattest film critic in America"; Christopher Lehmann-Haupt, "the *Times*'s sporting egghead." The *Spy* reviewer courageously forwards these opinions beneath pseudonymous cover. And following the "Moo Cow" format, he/she/it/they rarely pauses to explain why *Spy* finds these critics lacking, with the implication for that nervous reader wanting to show his sophistication being, *you mean you don't know*?

Say for instance that it's a Saturday afternoon and I'm flipping through the November issue of *Spy*, and I learn, thanks to reviewer of reviewers, Ignatz Ratzwizkiwxki (or "Chickenshit Pseudonymous Writer" in *Spy*speak—the name, another taste flag, refers to a character in a Preston Sturges film), that, "there are plenty of dumb people outside television. There is, for example, Anna Kisselgorf, the most credulous of the *Times*'s seemingly endless supply of dance reviewers. You could skate around Grand Central station in your socks and Kisselgorf would watch you, taking notes. . . .Just about nothing, it would appear, is dumber than a dancer—or a dance critic." The main evidence presented against Kisselgorf is one of her recent leads, which reads, "Fish gotta swim, birds gotta fly, but humans don't have to dangle from ropes, trapezes, and gymnasts' bars." There must be something wrong with me, I begin to think, because I don't see what's so terrible. In fact, as leads go, I'd rank it above average, and I'd go on to read the next sentence, except that *Spy* doesn't provide it, since the stupidity of the first is supposed to be self-evident. I guess that makes me dumb as a dancer or a dance critic. I read on to find that "people who go out for dance in adulthood sound a lot like people who went out for dance in high school," and though I don't know what that means either, I breathe a sigh of relief that I'm not one of those.

If rather straightforward lines like Kisselgorf's get lambasted, you can imagine what the reviewer of reviewers does to people who decide to take a risk. "For some of us terribly juvenile men," wrote Craig Unger in *New York Woman* of Kathleen Turner, "it's her portrayal of the femme fatale that remains painfully embedded in our American groin." A dangerous line, but not a bad one—self-mocking, vivid, and descriptive of the actress's success in having her intended effect. "Medic! Medic!," squeals *Spy*'s reviewer of reviewers, who lacks the courage to admit to his own name, never mind a risky opinion. "He's juvenile; he's prurient; he's dumb." *Spy*'s reviewer here sounds not so much the urban savvy as that guy in junior high school around whom you never said anything because you knew he was simply looking for something to mock.

Spy's irreverence is welcome. Its ability to tease itself is welcome. Lots of its jokes are welcome. But its championing of the put-down prose not only promotes wasteful fretting in its own readers but sets an example that is bound to be copied widely. That can only lead to more braincells filling up with styrofoam thoughts on style and fewer left to think about things that matter. □

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The Worst City Government

Because we regard the breakdown of big-city government a terrible problem, we plan to continue our reports, not only from D.C., but from New York's carnival and elsewhere. Nominations are welcome.

How to explain the decision of the Virgin Islands to import consultants from the Worst City Government in America? Who better, we say, to help set up a system of civil service gradations. After all, a few years ago federal auditors found that 80 percent of the D.C. housing authority's maintenance workers were "overgraded"—getting an electrician's salary, say, for taking out the trash....

While Marion Barry enjoys the company of suspected drug dealers, city managers oversee drug programs in their own way. In 1986, the city gave $75,000 for a study to a former campaign worker for a city councilman. The study found that citizens consider drugs a problem. The husband of a top city official received twice as much, mostly for another survey, which found that young people's attitudes toward drugs are strongly influenced by their parents. With drug-related murders at an all-time high, maybe the city can do one more poll to find out how people really feel about seeing their neighbors shot.

Any questions? Don't call D.C.'s drug abuse hotline. The number listed in the phone book is disconnected....

Runner-up for Worst City Government this month goes to New York for School Board 12, whose members "borrowed" expensive school supplies like computers, hired friends and family for classroom jobs (whether or not they could read), and took expense-paid trips to meetings in Las Vegas, Honolulu, and San Juan. The board member who cast the swing vote in the search for a new superintendent is a homeless heroin addict....

—*Katherine Boo*

THE WASHINGTON MONTHLY Journalism Award

for November 1988 is presented to

Patrick Boyle
The Washington Times

In a three part series, Boyle shows how the District of Columbia failed to levy large fines—let alone close—the Rose Guest House, a boarding house for the elderly and mentally ill that had been cited for literally hundreds of violations. At one point the city did toughen regulations for group homes, but the owners simply applied for and received rooming house licenses, which are easier to obtain.

Christopher Ringwald
Staten Island Advance

Ringwald's series shows that deinstitutionalization can work—if the mentally ill are placed in good group homes. He looked at the former patients of Willowbrook, the New York State home for the retarded that was closed when its scandalous conditions were exposed in 1972. Isabelle Weiner, for one, is not only living in a group home, but is also able to enjoy everything from going to the beauty parlor to flying cross-country to visit relatives.

...and one we forgot from October

Benjamin Weiser, Elsa Walsh
The Washington Post

Weiser and Walsh document a frightening increase in court cases that are settled confidentially and pose a great danger to the public welfare. In Washington, a physician settled for $30,000 with a patient who charged he had sexually assaulted her during an exam. The doctor's name was kept secret and he remains in practice.

The Monthly Journalism Award is presented each month to the best newspaper, magazine, television, or radio story (or series of stories) on our political system. Nominations for any newspaper, magazine, or radio or television station in the country are welcome. The subject can be government in its federal, state, or municipal manifestation.

The award for stories published or aired in December will be announced in the March issue. Nominations for stories published or aired in January will close February 15. The winner will be announced in the April issue. Two copies of the article or broadcast text should accompany the nomination.

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The Case Against Joe Nocera

How people like me helped ruin the public schools

by Joseph Nocera

It's two days before Christmas, and the snow has begun to fall here in the lovely little city of Northampton, Massachusetts. I won't pretend that it's not a beautiful sight. Glancing down from my office window, scarcely a block from the center of town, I see idyllic scenes everywhere, a picture postcard of small-town New England: the snow settling on the roof of the gorgeous, rococo church that anchors downtown; the crowds (such as they are in a place whose population barely exceeds 30,000) of happy Christmas shoppers loaded down with brightly wrapped presents; the cheerful commingling of friends in the parking lot right beneath my office. Just now, my office landlord, a lawyer who also teaches philosophy at Smith College and who works across the hall, came in to wish me a Merry Christmas. He gave me a pocket calendar he has made up every year. He was in wonderful spirits, and so was I. There are days when Northampton feels like nothing so much as a modern-day Grover's Corners, and this is certainly one of those days.

I moved here with my family two and a half years ago to take a job with a magazine. I've since learned a lot about the attractions of small-town life. I live in a place where I never have to lock my car, where a "traffic jam" means having to wait for the light to change twice, where the cost of things is a good 20 percent less than it is in, say, Boston. This past Halloween, a neighboring family held its annual pre-Trick-or-Treat party for the kids on the block; there must have been 60 people in the house, and everyone knew each other, and later, when we dispersed to go Trick-or-Treating, no one had to worry about whether there would be razor blades in the apples. That was another one of those times when I thought: This is nice.

And yet, and yet. I mention all this not to inspire jealousy, but to bring up the more complicated matter of personal taste. I don't deny the appeal of this life; indeed, Northampton is filled with transplanted New Yorkers who have embraced it with a vengeance. But the truth is, I've always thought of myself as a city boy. I still do. I grew up in what was then the gritty (and is now the hip) city of Providence, Rhode Island, population 150,000. Since then I've lived in Boston and Washington, Austin, Texas and Paris, France. I enjoy spending time in cities other people abhor, like Houston or Los Angeles. For reasons I can't quite explain, I am drawn to cities, finding them both comfortable and energizing. Northampton, on the other hand, always makes me feel a little edgy, a touch unfulfilled. In particular, the pace of small-town life bothers me. I never feel as if I am at the center of things, the way I do in a city.

So why am I here? It's not the job: I no longer do much work for the magazine that brought me to Northampton, nor is my wife employed in the local economy. And while I can toss off a half-dozen persuasive reasons for living here—how I've made good friends that I don't want to leave behind; how I don't think it's fair to my children to keep moving them from place to place; how I could never afford a similar house in a big city—I know in my heart of

Joseph Nocera, a contributing editor of Newsweek *and* The Washington Monthly, *is at work on a modern history of personal finance.*

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hearts that these are only partial explanations. There is another reason, one that looms larger in my mind than any other, one that I always feel a bit ashamed to admit to. I am talking about The Schools.

'Awfully obvious'

The public schools here are quite good—not the best in the region, perhaps (that distinction belongs to nearby Amherst), but good nonetheless. One can argue forever as to why this is so; my own belief is that places like Northampton and Amherst, little cities with populations between 30,000 and 50,000, are the perfect size for good school systems. They are large enough to have the critical mass and money needed for decent facilities, but small enough so that there is very little bureaucratic (or union) rigmarole standing between teachers and students. Also, teachers still have status and respect in a small town—including Yuppified small towns like mine—that they don't have in larger places.

Most important, there is a large group of white middle-class parents deeply involved in the public school system. One of the givens about American public education is that parental involvement—parental vigilance might be a more accurate description—is one of the two or three critical factors that determine whether a school system will be good or bad. Historically, that vigilance is provided by the educated class: predominately white, overwhelmingly middle class people who know how to "fight City Hall" and aren't afraid to do so. Not coincidentally, they are also the people most inclined to vote. Most cities have one PTA-type organization; Northampton has two, one geared towards fund-raising activities and another that acts as a tenacious, if ad hoc, inspector general, with the self-styled mission of keeping the school system's feet to the fire.

The result is that when my oldest child was ready to enter kindergarten this past September, I had no qualms about sending her to public school. I now fully expect that she'll stay in the public school system, as will my other children as they grow older. It would be hard to overstate my relief when I first realized that this was going to be possible. For one thing, my wife and I were suddenly spared a daunting financial burden. But since I was also anxious for my children to get a taste of the small-d democratic experience that the public schools provide, it was satisfying to know that their education would not suffer for that experience.

That sense of relief has done something else to me, though: it's planted me here as firmly as any job might have. Perhaps more firmly, since these days parents are more likely to shift jobs than shift their kids into a different, untried school system. A decent public school today is something to be treasured, and if you've found one for your kids, you don't abandon it lightly.

So over the past year or so, as I've daydreamed about moving to a big city, I've gradually come to the conclusion that I just can't do it. Not anytime soon, anyway. And the reason is The Schools. The thought of what it would cost to send my children to a private elementary school is sobering enough. But then when I think about the other option—sending them to public school—I shudder. I can't imagine sending my children to a big city public school system.

Look at them, for God's sake: Boston is a shambles, wrecked by the busing tragedies of the 1970s. In Boston, 40 percent of the kids who enter ninth grade will drop out before graduation. Washington is not much better, a system clogged with bureaucrats, where union grievances generate more passion than any seventh grade history lesson. New York? You can scarcely pick up an edition of the *Times* without reading about some new outrage: teachers robbed and beaten in their classrooms; an alcoholic principal who is absent more than he is present; a district school board dealing cocaine; a superintendent, Richard Green, who seems in way over his head, and on and on. When the definitive history of the decline and fall of New York is written, the disgrace of the public school system will surely rank high on the list of causes. The destruction of the large public school systems in America is one of the great tragedies of our time. And because schools are so important, the cities, by permitting their destruction, have effectively abandoned people like me.

> I've chosen to opt out and there is no getting around that unpleasant little fact. Perhaps this is why I find myself cringing a little whenever the subject of The Schools comes up.

Or perhaps I'm being too easy on myself. Perhaps it is more accurate to say that it is people like me who have done the abandoning. Isn't it obvious today that big city public school systems began their

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decline at precisely the moment when the white middle class began fleeing them? It seems awfully obvious to me. You can talk all you want about the debilitating effects of busing or ill-equipped teachers, but to my mind, the most debilitating factor by far in the disintegration of the public schools was the unwillingness of the white middle class, *as a class*, to do what they had always done: stand and fight to keep the schools good. I don't mean to sound too self-flagellatory, but I know in my soul that when I decided to stay in Northampton so that my children could go to school here, I was making the same moral choice that hundreds of thousands had before me. I was choosing not to stand and fight too.

Yes, I realize that the decline of the schools is not my fault: the battle was lost long before I ever became a parent. And yes, I know that my motives are relatively pure—I am simply trying to do right by my children. I now think it would be the height of irresponsibility to send my children to a big public school system just so that I can live in the big city. I can even concede that the guilty parties extend well beyond my class: black politicians and school administrators, for instance, who ought to have made the salvation of the public schools their personal crusade but chose instead to look the other way. Still. . .I've chosen to opt out, and there is no getting around that unpleasant little fact. Perhaps this is why I find myself cringing a little whenever the subject of The Schools comes up.

Bennett's missing troops

Almost from its birth 20 years ago, this magazine has argued that the Vietnam war lasted as long as it did because of its "classist" nature. The central thesis, argued in articles by Suzannah Lessard and later by James Fallows, was that because neither the decision-makers in the government *nor anyone they knew* had children fighting and dying in Vietnam, they had no personal incentive to bring the war to a halt. The government's generous college-deferment system, steeped as it was in class distinctions, allowed the white middle class to avoid the tragic consequences of the war. And the people who did the fighting and dying in the place of the college-deferred were those whose voices were least heard in Washington: the poor and the disfranchised.

The fundamental truth of this insight is now so widely accepted that breast-beating sixties memoirists today toss it off routinely as they explain how they were racked with class-induced guilt, even as they went without sleep for a week in order to flunk their physical. (Yeah, sure you were, buddy.) But as someone who had a college deferment, I don't remember that thought crossing my mind until many years later. Nor do I remember it being discussed by anyone I knew in college. Although today it seems self-evident that letting the white middle class avoid the war virtually guaranteed its continuation, it wasn't self-evident at the time. There was simply too much denial going on.

I bring this up because I believe that the decline of the public schools is rooted in the same cause. Just as with the Vietnam war, as soon as the white middle class no longer had a stake in the public schools, the surest pressure on school systems to provide a decent education instantly disappeared.

> None of us has Perot's money. For God's sake, we ought to care as much about saving the public schools as he does.

The constituency that most naturally forces change had gone, leaving behind, as with Vietnam, those who tended to be powerless. Sure, there were lawsuits, and "implementations," and any number of calls for reform—and there were peace talks in Paris in 1972, too—but I'm talking about *real* pressure, face-to-face pressure, the kind of pressure that scares the people in the line jobs. Once the middle class was gone, no mayor was going to get booted out of office because the schools were bad. No incompetent teacher had to worry about angry parents calling for his or her head "downtown." No third-rate educationalist at the local teachers college had to fear having his or her methods criticized by anyone that mattered. One man who might have mattered, William Bennett, the former education secretary, huffed and puffed about all these issues and more. But although his potential constituency, the white middle class, clucked their approval, they—we—still weren't willing to be engaged. We weren't involved anymore; it wasn't our problem. Thus, to those inside the school systems, Bennett was never a real threat. He was a general without an army.

The analogy to the Vietnam war can be extended even to the extent of the denial. It amuses me sometimes to hear people like myself decry the state of the public schools. We bemoan the lack of money, the decaying facilities, the absurd credentialism, the high foolishness of the school boards. We applaud the burgeoning reform movement. And everything we say is deeply, undeniably true. We can see every problem with the schools clearly except one: the fact that our decision to abandon the schools has helped

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It would take only a few eloquent black voices to turn the schools into a moral cause.

create all the other problems. One small example: In the early 1980s, Massachusetts passed one of those tax cap measures, called Proposition 2½, which has turned out to be—surprise, surprise—a force for genuine evil in the public schools. Would Prop 2½ have passed had the middle class still had a stake in the schools? I wonder. I also wonder whether 20 years from now, in the next round of breast-beating memoirs, the exodus of the white middle class from the public schools will finally be seen for what it was. Individually, every parent's rationale made impeccable sense—"I can't deprive my children of a decent education"—but collectively, it was a deeply destructive act. I wonder about that a lot these days.

The inflamed flock

The main reason the white middle class fled, of course, is race, or more precisely, the complicated admixture of race and class and good intentions gone awry. The fundamental good intention—which even today, strikes one as both moral and right—was to integrate the public classroom, and in so doing, to equalize the resources available to all school children. In Boston, this was done through enforced busing. In Washington, it was done through a series of judicial edicts that attempted to spread the good teachers and resources throughout the system. In other big city districts, judges weren't involved; school committees, seeing the handwriting on the wall, tried to do it themselves.

However moral the intent, the result almost always was the same. The white middle class left. The historic parental vigilance I mentioned earlier had had a lot to do with creating the two-tiered systems—one in which schools attended by the kids of the white middle class had better teachers, better equipment, better everything than those attended by the kids of the poor. This did not happen because the white middle-class parents were racists, necessarily; it happened because they knew how to manipulate the system and were willing to do so on behalf of their kids. Their neighborhood schools became little havens of decent education, and they didn't much care what happened in the other public schools.

In retrospect, this behavior, though perfectly understandable, was tragically short-sighted. When the judicial fiats made those safe havens untenable, the white middle class quickly discovered what the poor had always known: there weren't enough good teachers, decent equipment, and so forth to go around. For that matter, there weren't even enough good *students* to go around; along with everything else, middle-class parents had to start worrying about whether their kids were going to be mugged in school.

Faced with the grim fact that their children's education was quickly deteriorating, middle-class parents essentially had two choices: They could stay and pour the energy that had once gone into improving the neighborhood school into improving the entire school system—a frightening task, to be sure. Or they could leave. Invariably, they chose the latter.

And it wasn't just the white middle class that fled. The black middle class, and even the black poor who were especially ambitious for their children, were getting out as fast as they could too, though not to the suburbs. They headed mainly for the parochial schools, which subsequently became integration's great success story, even as the public schools became integration's great failure. Later, apologists for the public schools would point out that parochial schools had a number of inherent advantages—they could toss out troublemakers, for instance. But it is equally true that many of the advantages enjoyed by parochial schools simply had to do with common sense: they cared more about hiring teachers who could read than teachers who had held whatever meaningless credential was necessary to teach reading in the public school system.

As it happens, parochial schools were a much more viable alternative for blacks than whites. For one thing, there simply weren't that many parochial schools left by the late 1970s. (During the 1960s and early 1970s, parochial schools were viewed as doomed institutions, and hundreds were closed by the Catholic Church.) For another, the American Church was adamant about not allowing its schools to become the new safe haven for whites only. To prevent that from happening, Catholic school officials often actively encouraged blacks to enroll, while discouraging whites, a courageous act that inflamed the Church's white flock, who were often blocked from putting their children in the parish school.

The sins of St. Ted

There is no place in America where all this played out as starkly and as sadly as in Boston. I was living there during that city's terrible busing ordeal of the mid-1970s, just finishing up college, when Judge Arthur Garrity's busing plan took effect in 1974. I

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remember feeling a sense of contempt, of real moral superiority, toward the people who opposed busing, easy enough to do when you're young and single and your mind is uncluttered with worries about the upbringing of your flesh and blood. *Those people are racists*, I thought. *Their excuses are all smokescreens*. And of course, many of the most violent opponents of busing *were* racists, and many of their excuses *were* smokescreens. It's worth remembering that their protests were never once aimed at making their kids' schools better—which might have actually had some effect—but were intended solely to keep blacks out, which had the effect of turning the world against them. Not to condone that racism in any way, but one of the things I understand now that I didn't then was that the poor whites were lashing out at least in part out of a sense of their own impotence. The white parents whose kids were bused were those who had absolutely no other choice. They saw their kids being treated as guinea pigs, and they didn't like it. What parent would?

Another thing I can see now that I didn't then was how keenly the opponents of busing felt the class divide. "Thousands of letters poured into [Judge Garrity's] chambers," writes J. Anthony Lukas in *Common Ground*, his great book about the Boston busing crisis, "some reasoned arguments against busing, but most of them fierce attacks on his character and lineage. . . . Many of the angriest letters and phone calls emphasized the judge's remoteness from Boston, his long residence in affluent Wellesley, where his family and friends were exempt from his court order." (Garrity had two teenage daughters in high school at the time.)

My own memory is that it became difficult for even the once-sainted Ted Kennedy to enter Southie after the buses began rolling. Where did Ted Kennedy's kids go to school? the antibusing forces used to taunt. Where did Mayor Kevin White's kids go to school? Not to any public school in Boston, that's for sure. To believe that integration was the only moral course does not mean that Garrity's busing orders were the only moral option. Perhaps it *was* the only way, given the legendary intransigence of the Boston School Committee. But now that I am a parent and view these matters through a different prism, Garrity's orders strike me as unnecessarily cruel, as if he were punishing the school children for the actions of their elders. Besides, to return to the Vietnam parallel, wouldn't it have made a huge difference in how integration was implemented if Judge Garrity's or Ted Kennedy's or Kevin White's kids had been enrolled in the Boston schools? However deeply they felt about the busing crisis, they could never have the personal stake of someone whose child was being bused.

Inasmuch as the rich have never sent their kids to public school, perhaps it was too much to expect Ted Kennedy to put his kids in the school system. Even so, it wouldn't have mattered if the white middle class had stayed. They could have served as a kind of proxy for the Garritys and the Kennedys and the Mayor Whites, a role the white middle class often plays in our society. Instead, here's what happened: In 1972, there were 96,000 students enrolled in the Boston schools, of whom 60 percent were white. Sixteen years later, only 57,000 students remain, with less than a quarter of them white.

Think about that for a minute. That means that 44,000 white students have left the school system. Forty-four thousand! Nearly half the students in the school system have vanished, almost all of them the sons and daughters of the white middle class. Or, to put it another way, those 44,000 students represent 75,000 or so parents who effectively have dropped out of the Boston public school system.

It takes, I believe, a strong dose of denial to believe that those 75,000 middle-class parents would not have made a difference. During the time they have been fleeing, the Boston school system has gone through one mediocre superintendent after another (the current man, Lavel Wilson, nearly lost his job recently when the school board barely gave him a vote of confidence; a few days after the vote, he demanded a $120,000 annual housing allowance); it has seen the reading and other test scores drop dramatically; and it has become a symbol of everything that is wrong with urban schools in America. The schools in Boston are so bad that when Boston University offered to take over some of the worst of them in Chelsea, the community leapt at the chance. (Naturally, the teachers' union has gone to court to stop Boston University.) Since the white middle class left, the system has simply fallen apart. Can this really be sheer coincidence? I think not.

The editor's son

One painful result of this massive exodus of the white middle class is that those few who did stay and fight wound up feeling like suckers. In his book, Lukas tells the story of one such couple, Colin and Joan Diver, whose son Brad was in elementary school. Colin Diver was a lawyer who worked for Mayor White. When he first moved to Boston, he had lived in the suburbs but eventually rejected what he saw as the sterility of suburbia to become an urban homesteader in the city. ("Both Colin and Joan yearned for the racial, ethnic, and class mix to be found only in the inner city," writes Lukas of their decision to move to Boston's South End.) Happily for them, their son was enrolled in one of those wonderful little havens, a good, innovative,

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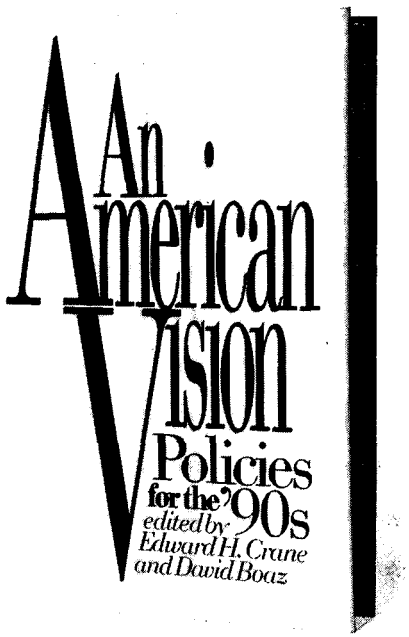

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integrated public school, called Bancroft, whose recent transformation showed exactly the kind of effect an involved white middle class can have. (Again, from *Common Ground*: "One night in August 1967, two dozen young professionals gathered. . .to consider founding a private school. As they haggled over curriculum, Susan Thomas whispered to Piers Lewis, 'If we put a fraction of this energy into a public school, I bet we could make it into what we want.'" Which is precisely what they did.)

Over time, however, the quality of the Divers' little school was eroded by one after another of Garrity's decrees. Was Garrity's heart in the right place? Of course it was. Did that do the Divers any good? Of course not. In frustration, parents began moving their kids out of the school. Those who remained, like the Divers, were worn down. They had other problems as well—their neighborhood had deteriorated badly, making it dangerous for them even to go outside their own house. But the failure of the school weighed heavily upon them.

By 1976, two years after busing began, it had come to this: "Many Bancroft students were in academic difficulties, with reading scores a particular focus of concern. Joan and Colin were dismayed to learn that Brad's scores had actually declined. As a second-grader he had tested as 'Third Grade, 7-9 Months'; as a third-grader, he registered only as 'Third Grade, 2-4 Months.' For a child of Brad's promise, that was plainly unacceptable. Joan and Colin wondered once again whether they were sacrificing their children's future on the altar of their social principles." Soon afterwards, the Divers decided they too had to leave.

Here is the rub of course. Here is what makes each middle-class parent's personal, wrenching decision to move so understandable and ultimately so forgivable. *No one is willing to sacrifice their children on the altar of their social principles.* How can they? It's one thing to sacrifice yourself, but quite another to offer up your children, about whom you have overwhelming feelings of protection and in whom you invest your most deeply felt hopes and dreams. Parents do things for their children they would never do for anyone else. My grandfather, who was a traveling salesman, hocked his only car to pay for my mother's wedding. Parents quit jobs they love to take higher paying work they hate for the sake of their children. This magazine has long believed that parents who make such a "career sacrifice" are actually hurting their children—that the extra money means little in the grand scheme of things if the parents don't love what they're doing. Sacrifice the money, the editor argues, and be happy in your work and family.

But though he is a passionate believer in public schools, I have never once heard the editor suggest that one should sacrifice the chance to send one's children to private school in order to help save the public school system. It's an unthinkable thought. The editor himself took his son out of Washington's public schools under circumstances not unlike those faced by the Divers. If you have the option, dammit, you take it.

I don't mean to suggest that it can ever be otherwise. How do you counteract one of humanity's most strongly felt emotions? But that's also why the state of the big city public school systems can seem so hopeless to me at times. Unless you have an involved middle class—unless you have that parental vigilance—it is difficult to see how things are going to change.

The blacks' shame

Where is the impetus for change to come from? Just as it is too much to ask Ted Kennedy to send his kids to public school, it is also probably too much to expect the parents with kids still in public school to pick up where the middle class left off. In Boston, court-ordered busing is going to end soon, and in order to prepare for the change, the school committee has held a series of public hearings. *The Boston Globe* ran a story on the hearings, noting that even though three-quarters of the students are now black, Hispanic, or Asian, "the typical speaker [at the sparsely attended hearings] was a white, well-educated and middle-class parent." The reporter found this fact "ironic," but she also quoted a consultant who got to the heart of the matter: "When you're talking about the underclass," he said, "these people don't see themselves as part of the mainstream. When you talk about reforms that are good, they think you're not talking about them."

No, if the public schools are ever going to get better, the forces for change are going to have to come from people outside the system. In effect, we have to find a way to replace the club of parental vigilance with some other, equally powerful force. What might that be? One possibility ought to be America's urban black leadership, which has been as much at fault in the decline of the public schools as the white middle class. When have you ever heard a black politician in New York talk openly about the shame of the schools? How many black school administrators are willing to back the major reforms that might help turn their schools around? In general, the black leadership has been more interested in perpetuating a system that provides political sinecures in the administration building and protects incompetence among the rank and file than in doing anything for the kids who are stuck in the schools. This may sound harsh, but it is inarguably true. That is their shame. It would take only a few eloquent black voices to turn the state of the schools

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> Just as with the Vietnam war, as soon as the white middle class no longer had a stake in the public schools the surest pressure on school systems to provide a decent education disappeared.

into the moral cause it ought to be.

Then there's the reform movement itself, which has gained considerable steam these past few years. As laudable as this is, we ought not kid ourselves about the reasons why. One, the most compelling, is that the schools have gotten so bad that radical measures now are acceptable in a way they weren't even ten years ago. Another is that statewide reforms help the Northamptons as much as the Bostons—perhaps more so since out here in the sticks we have a better chance of making sure they are implemented. You can live in the suburbs and still have a personal stake in reform.

But the reforms have gained momentum also because they seem so obviously *right*. It's criminal that the unions and the bureaucrats now regularly put their own interests ahead of their students. It's absurd, for unions to automatically protect bad teachers and for schools to require master's degrees for pay raises instead of demonstrated ability. It's infuriating the way the whole system is designed to discourage better, more idealistic people from becoming teachers. No one denies any of these things any more. The system has gotten warped, and if there is one thing the white middle class can do from the outside, it is to actively back the reforms that will unwarp it.

Waiting for Perot

There is even a role model of sorts. I was living in Texas a few years ago when Ross Perot pushed through his school reform package. It was a magnificent accomplishment, and the reforms he got turned into law were radical enough that just about everyone employed by the schools was against them. Perot by then had no personal stake in the public schools; his kids were grown. Inasmuch as he was a Texas businessman who depended on several lucrative contracts from the state, he had little to gain by championing this cause and much to lose. The only reason he did it was this: it was the right thing to do. He was on the side of the angels, and everyone knew it, and his willingness to stick his neck out is the only reason the reforms passed in the face of so much self-interested opposition.

Okay, none of us has Perot's money (he paid lobbyists on the issue out of his own pocket), or his visibility, and not many of us have his energy. But we ought to at least have his passion. We ought to care as much about saving the public schools as Ross Perot does. Since the white middle class is not going to return to the inner-city public schools anytime soon, it ought to feel moral obligation to push for change from the outside, just as Perot did. In the end, that's the only decent way to expiate the guilt.

In the meantime, the exodus continues. I was in Washington not long ago looking up old friends who had lived in the city when I had—people who had loved the city the way I did. I couldn't help but notice that most of them didn't live in Washington anymore. They lived in Bethesda. They lived in Chevy Chase. They lived in Alexandria. These were generally people who had sneered at suburbia a decade ago but were now making their peace with the suburbs. "It's nice here," they told me half-heartedly, and I knew exactly what they meant. But they also admitted, invariably, that they had moved to gain access to The Schools, and as I listened to them say those words, I could hear the guilt. It is in the sound of that guilt, I think, that one can find hope.

I fervently pray the day will come when the big city public schools get decent again. If that were to happen, I would gladly move back to the city and put my children in the schools. I would become an involved middle-class parent. In the meantime, I will watch closely from the sidelines, applauding when progress is made (when, say, Boston University takes over the Chelsea schools), grimacing when there are setbacks. But I also know that until they change, I won't be back. Yes, I've done the right thing for my kids, but I'll never, ever feel good about it. I'll always feel as if I'm an unindicted coconspirator in the one great crime of my class. □

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Who We Are

What we believe. Why we believe it.

This year is our 20th anniversary and we plan to celebrate the event in a variety of ways. In this issue, there is a special section of excerpts from what we feel are some of our best or most representative articles from our first twenty years. Next month, there will be a section in which our former editors, including Jonathan Alter, Nicholas Lemann, Walter Shapiro, Mickey Kaus, James Fallows, and Michael Kinsley, tell us how they would like to change the Monthly*'s "gospel," the ideas about process and policy that have become identified with this magazine, or otherwise modify our approach. Susbsequent issues will include similar special features. We've divided this anniversary supplement into five sections, the first being Community.*

The restoration of the American sense of community has been behind many of the causes that the Monthly *has championed. We have challenged the forces that divide and separate—from snobbery to credentialism to the adversary system of law and the special interest groups symbolized by PACs. We have deplored the decline of institutions like the public schools that used to bring people together and the resulting isolation of the affluent. We want the rich to do their part by sharing the burden of military service. And we don't want them to take more than their fair share, which is why we oppose Social Security for the wealthy paid for by the taxes of the working poor.*

We support radical reform of public education, not only so that the schools will provide a good education for all, including the poor children who need it most, but will encourage children from different social classes to come together. This belief in breaking down class barriers underlies our support for a national service draft that will provide manpower for the military and for the many urgent civilian tasks that face the nation, from caring for the elderly to building roads and cleaning up the environment.

Community

by Charles Peters

From Tilting at Windmills *(Addison-Wesley, $18.95, 1988).*

Why we were mired in the tragedy of Vietnam was the central question facing the nation as we began publishing *The Washington Monthly* in January 1969. The war dominated our table of contents for the next several years and led to the formulation of many of the principles that continue to dominate it today.

One theme that soon emerged was the importance of speaking up and listening down. Subordinates in government must speak up, to confront their superiors with bad news, and the people in charge must listen down, to encourage subordinates to make them face unhappy truths.

I knew that a large part of the foreign affairs bureaucracy opposed the war, and I was convinced

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that the government needed more people who were psychologically ready to resign—who, when vital issues were at stake, would stand up to their superiors and fight to the point of losing their jobs. Of all the wrong decisions I had seen made in government, wrong ideas and information had played no greater role than the failure of people with the right ideas and information to press their case courageously.

Another reason for our continuing involvement in the war, I believed, was the machismo of the American male—his need to prove his manhood, his need to win, and his deep reluctance to admit having been wrong. The *Monthly*'s concern with the macho element in the male character led us to early involvement in the feminist revolution. A month before the August 1970 march down Fifth Avenue that marked the emergence of the women's movement, we published "Violence and the Masculine Mystique." Our concern was more the liberation of males than that of women or gays, because the liberated male would no longer need to beat up on other people, either psychologically or literally.

We were not welcomed by those in the women's movement whose goal was to play male roles in the same way that men have traditionally performed them. They wanted to imitate men, when in many ways we thought men should imitate women. Volunteerism was an example. Many women had come to scorn volunteering as a form of being a sucker. Was the triumph of their daughters' revolution going to mean donning dress-for-success suits and being paid to lobby for the special interests?

I wanted women—and men—to free themselves from slavery to money.

Another subject liberals didn't want to face was draft evasion by the upper class. This not only left the poor to die in Vietnam but helped to lengthen the war. If the sons of the rich had gone, opposition to the war from their influential parents would have brought it quickly to a halt. Try as I might, I could not find a young man willing to write this piece. Finally, in April 1972, Suzannah Lessard agreed to do it. The article appeared under the title "Let Those Hillbillies Go Get Shot," which was a remark my wife had overheard a college student make in a bookstore.

Unfortunately, the article didn't receive much attention. Then, a few months later, James Fallows joined the *Monthly*'s staff. Jim told me he had evaded the draft by starving himself to get his weight below the minimum army requirement for his height and that most of his Harvard classmates had used similar tactics. At the same time, he saw young men from the lower-middle-class neighborhood of Chelsea go through the induction center without trying any tricks, and a high proportion of them went on to risk their lives in Vietnam. As Jim and I discussed this issue over the next couple of years, he became increasingly obsessed with the belief that he had to face what he had done. The result was "What Did You Do in the Class War, Daddy?"

This article had impact; it was widely reprinted and quoted. By 1975, when it appeared, thoughtful people were becoming concerned about the social fragmentation of America, a process in which the undemocratic Vietnam draft had played a significant role. Affluent Americans had chosen to let the lower classes do the dying, and the cost of their choice now had to be confronted. The cost was most obvious in the embitterment of the Vietnam veterans. But beyond that, serious damage had been done to the idea of democratic community, which was at the heart of the American dream. □

Taste, Class, and Mary Tyler Moore

by Suzannah Lessard

This piece appeared in 1975.

The work of Edith Wharton may seem an unlikely place to look for illumination of current affairs, but there is one respect in which her novels and stories cast light on the workings of our own world. That is the role which cultivation, in the sense of a sophisticated appreciation of the arts and of ideas, plays in the American class structure. Social standing, in the old sense of who your parents are, is no longer a criterion, although a touch of that sort of glitter still can be made to go a long way; the result is a more accessible elite, and a more interesting one, in the sense that talent rather than genealogical credentials is the surer ticket to social success.

The fact that the high circles are accessible to a variety of people, however, does not mean that people judge each other more liberally than they once did. In fact, a case could be made that, in the absence of a standard measure of acceptability, a far more obsessive and byzantine method of cataloging has evolved. The rapid, sophisticated computations of multiple labels—dress, job, school, intelligence,

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political attitudes, accents, and acquaintances—with which one person judges whether another "is one of us" make the old society's manner of judging (what's your pedigree—usually meaning how much money do you have and how long have you had it) seem more innocent than snobbish. Being "in" nowadays is a condition that must be constantly and feverishly maintained and can depend upon such unexpected attributes as knowing a Black Panther yesterday or being an aficionado of the "Mary Tyler Moore Show" today (don't rely on this one—it's already stale).

To a degree, this is just a more frenetic version of the value system Mrs. Wharton made fun of—the acquisition of the latest avant-garde paintings, rushing out to the Theater of the Absurd, quickly boning up on Malraux to add gloss to your cocktail conversation—more frenetic perhaps because a social aspirant now has nothing but cultivation to rely on to distinguish himself, has no listing in a social register to point to when this other, extremely vulnerable form of legitimacy begins to erode.

The chief damage done by the excessive preoccupation with and fear of philistinism is that it cramps growth and exchange of ideas. The endeavor to identify enduring values—in art, in political ideas, in ways of seeing—is a genuine one, but if one party is going to feel a withering panic when another adroitly brands his icon as phony no dialogue can take place, only war, a war of self-esteem. Thus in the name of the really important work of distinguishing between the genuine and the ersatz, ideas are turned into mascots and slogans in a struggle for a kind of personal ascendency. □

Who's A Snob and Who's Not

by James Fallows

This piece appeared in 1979.

Viewed with even a modestly fresh eye, there is a staggering disproportion between problem and response in our intellectual and political world. On the one side, we have a system of government that seems to reduce all presidents to helplessness or deception and all congressmen to petty self-protection. On the other side, we have the professional thinkers and writers and politicians, the people who are supposedly in business to deal with questions such as these, but whose main interest in confronting them seems not to be to push for new answers or to evaluate the suggestions that are already on hand but to use each new issue as a momentary platform upon which to display their deft cavorting, and from which to land a rabbit punch on someone else.

The emphasis on refined and sophisticated poses, the lack of interest in communicating with "the mass," have left their mark. This style of discussion is snobbish because of its deliberate disconnection from the substance of an issue and from the people who might want to hear an answer; it is dangerous not simply for the poison it spreads but also because of the time it wastes.

When loosing a *bon mot* against politicians in *The New York Review of Books* or chortling his way through a review of the current vulgar best sellers, Gore Vidal is more intent on turning the arch phrase than on presenting an idea; political ideas, especially, are for him mere excuses to display his exquisite moves. Garry Wills, who at times is one of the finest critics, too often seems to care more about including the extra quote and qualification that will prove his erudition than with making his meaning clear. (This is true, beyond point of parody, of William F. Buckley.) The political put-down artists—Emmett Tyrrell on the right, Alexander Cockburn on the left—can be vastly entertaining, but they care more about putting on a good show and blooding their swords than informing or understanding.

The effects of the put-down and the pose can be grave. When most people write about war or money or energy merely to strut their stuff or indulge a sneer, we end up laughing—as the society burns.

I sometimes think of a scene from World War II: the small platoon trapped in the jungle, surrounded by Japanese, searching for a way out. There is only one thought in the lieutenant's mind, and that is to find the one right route of escape. He will not make the situation needlessly complex, for he wants to draw on every single member of his platoon with a chance of providing an answer—but neither will he glibly simplify it, for an answer produced that way would be useless. The last thing he wants to do is use this as an occasion for sneering, for sneers would get in the way of survival.

This is what the lieutenant would do in the jungle. But how would some of our writers help him?

John Simon: With the gradual degradation of the gene pool, a fact these ferret-faced enlisted men make plain every day, it is hardly a surprise that vulgarities of language and thought grow steadily more frequent. One ill-favored corporal called the tree with a sniper in it a "goddam palm tree" when it was actually a subspecies of the tropical pineapple.

New York Review (pick your author): One of the lesser known figures of the *nouvelle vague*, Pierre

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Bonnard ("Bonne" to his friends, tantalizingly reminiscent of Proust's "Bonne Mere") expressed his sarcastic but nonetheless existential view of the anomie of his days with his famous question, "*Ou sont les Japs?*" It is a question Nietzsche might have asked Dostoevski, and been answered this way—"*Die Japs sind in der wald*."

Gore Vidal: Our slant-eyed friends lolled about the jungle doing whatever it is soldiers do to advance the interests of Dai Nippon. From the deliciously depraved glances they cast at each other's biceps and well-formed bottoms, it was clear that these happy samurai had recaptured the secret of the Spartan army's special snap. Alas, even the fondly remembered West Point of my boyhood (where my father was an instructor; by the way, I'm related to a lot of aristocrats) never overcame Empire America's slavish devotion to the missionary position. □

A Rebirth of Virtue: Religion and Liberal Renewal

by Kathleen Kennedy Townsend

This piece appeared in 1982.

"The hogs were really feeding. The greed level, the level of opportunism just got out of control." The speaker is the director of the Office of Management and Budget, describing the final negotiations among the leaders of our nation, liberals and conservatives alike, that led to the 1981 tax bill.

"I hate to say this, but I don't like to work with poor people. They are the kind of people who don't interest me. I can't help it; I'm not a nice guy; I don't like poor people." The speaker, more candid than most but not unrepresentative of his colleagues, is a leading Washington psychiatrist.

I don't know about you, but to me these examples suggest that this country is in serious trouble, and that the crisis, at bottom, is a moral one. We've lost something at the core of our national character that once acted to shape our behavior. We've lost our sense of virtue.

Maybe the Moral Majority is on to something. It's on to it too narrowly. It has applied its definition of virtue specifically to particular political positions that are insensitive to the discriminations suffered by blacks and that are militaristic and antifemale. This has given the idea of moral virtue a bad name. But the basic feeling that a spiritual renewal and a repairing of American moral fabric have something to do with each other is not far off the mark. Most liberal Democrats nowadays do not appreciate its importance. Discussion of moral values makes them uneasy.

Religious conviction—in all faiths—gives us the ability to reject the easy and safe career, or at least to risk that career if it conflicts with our ability to speak truthfully and act responsibly. It teaches us—rightly, I think—that happiness is hollow and ephemeral compared to the satisfactions of a life of service. It can inspire us to bear public denunciation and ridicule if we know that "the cause endures and the hopes still lives." And it can allow us to forgive and to love those who criticize us.

Instead of that model of modern thinking, the Washington psychiatrist, religion gives us the model of Saint Francis of Assisi, with his indifference to material things and his passionate concern for the poor. By cutting itself off from religion, the left has failed, as Harvey Cox, a professor of religion at Harvard, puts it, "to understand the power and significance of myth and ritual and symbol in the lives of ordinary people. . . . It has consistently abandoned the task of drawing out these cultural resources and turned the whole field over to the right."

Among many liberals, religion, if it is recognized at all, is to be cool, low-key, and unimportant. Of course it's only a small step from here to the feeling that fervor, especially when harnessed to social ends, is, well, gauche.

Interestingly, liberals who mock the idea of sin and punishment and find evangelists particularly odious are often able to tolerate and even applaud this type of religiosity among blacks. Thus the northern white Marc Connelly could in 1931 write *Green Pastures*, a play of biblical tales performed by blacks speaking in southern accents, while being an agnostic himself. Although the black actor asked to play "de Lawd" suffered misgivings as to whether the play insulted his people, the show enjoyed phenomenal Broadway success and the critics raved. "The real spiritual hunger and steadfast faith of these souls is carried over the footlights by the simplest and most unaffected means," wrote the *New York Herald Tribune* critic.

Of course such spiritual hunger and steadfast faith wouldn't have counted for much if the play had been about whites. In fact, it probably would have flopped.

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In this connection, it is worth reflecting on the greatest liberal triumph of my lifetime—the success of the civil rights movement in the 1960s. The movement was led by black clergymen who simply asked if segregation was consistent with the teachings of Jesus. This religious appeal had more impact than all the briefs of the government and the American Civil Liberties Union combined. It inspired Americans to examine their virtues and provided a moral foundation necessary to support legal change.

I believe liberals can achieve such triumphs again, but only if they open themselves up to their own religious impulses and—like the Martin Luther Kings and the Robert F. Kennedys—reach out to average Americans in a way that touches their souls. □

A Kind Word for the Spoils System

by Charles Peters

The liberal distrust of religion has been matched at times by a distrust of politics—the assumption that its practitioners were crude philistines or crooked deceivers. But, as Charles Peters wrote in 1976, increased participation in the workings of government is key to building a sense of community.

Anyone who has had a reasonable amount of contact with the federal government has encountered people who should be fired. There are some superb civil servants—maybe 10 percent of the total—who have every right to become indignant at blanket criticism of government workers. There are another 50 to 60 percent who range from adequate to good. Unfortunately, that leaves 30 or 40 percent from marginal to outright incompetent.

Yet fewer than 1 percent are fired each year. This is because 93 percent are under some form of civil service and therefore virtually impossible to fire.

Imagine yourself a supervisor with an employee who does nothing but read the paper and take coffee breaks. Thinking of firing him, you might turn to Title 5 of the U.S. Code and peruse parts 752.101 through 752.402 and 772.101 through 772.404, which describe one hearing and appeal after another. By the time you reached the end of 772.404, you'd say the hell with it and toss him the sports section.

I came to this position after a long journey through government that I began on the other side of the civil service question.

In the late 1950s, while working on the staff of the West Virginia legislature, I drafted a bill designed to transform a patronage-ridden personnel system into a civil service based on merit and offering genuine career protection for state employees. Wanting to get that bill enacted into law was one of the reasons I ran for the legislature in the next election, and it was a proud day in my life when the bill, bearing my name, was passed in the following session.

Then I came to Washington. Having seen the evils of too much political patronage, I was now exposed to the evils of too much civil service. The terrible disruption of continuity that came from massive personnel changes following each election in West Virginia was offset in Washington by the defensiveness and caution of civil servants primarily devoted to the protection of the institution for which they worked. If you can be fired only if your job is abolished—as is the case with practically all civil servants—then your only fear is that your agency will be diminished in a way that might threaten your job. Furthermore, the civil servant is not accountable to the public he is supposed to be serving.

It is widely assumed that a political patronage system will result in unqualified people, not selected on merit, making decisions for partisan political reasons. Why do political employees have to be unqualified? You can require by law that a politically appointed secretary be able to type 50 words a minute, just like the civil service appointee.

The only real advantage I have seen to the career civil servant is continuity. So instead of abolishing the civil service, I would urge cutting it by 50 percent and filling the remaining half with political appointees who can be fired at any time.

Being able to fire people is important for two reasons: 1) to permit you to hire the people you want and to get rid of those you don't want, and 2) to make it possible for you to attract the kind of risk-takers who are repelled by the safe civil service and the political emasculation it entails.

The problem with achieving all this is that for years Americans have been brainwashed by textbooks that make politics sound bad and civil service sound shiny clean.

We have an idiotic regard for people who are "above" politics. James Forrestal, then secretary of defense, and one of countless possible examples, was praised by *The New York Times* for being above politics when he didn't support Truman in 1948. He and the *Times* were astounded when Truman fired

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him. Forrestal was a Coriolanus. For him, being above politics really meant above the mob.

We have too many Forrestals now, and what they don't understand is that being above the mob means being above the practice of democratic politics. They, and a good many of the rest of us, have forgotten that democratic politics is supposed to be the way we determine who governs this country. □

The Culture of Institutions

When The Washington Monthly *instituted a new column in 1969, "The Culture of Bureaucracy," most people thought it was about concerts at Constitution Hall or exhibits at the National Gallery. But we meant culture in another sense. We wanted to look at the institutions that govern our lives in the way an anthropologist looked at a south sea island. Bad decisions and bad policies were usually caused by a combination of the character of the individuals involved and of the bureaucratic pressures in the organization they work for. The latter had hardly been examined by the press at all.*

The press is doing a better job today, especially in covering business, but culture is still an underused key to understanding everything from why the Pentagon buys wrong weapons to why you can't fathom your tax forms—even to why the press wastes time talking to big shots who don't know what's going on, instead of to the people at the working level who could tell the reporter that those seals on that booster rocket won't hold.

The Prince and His Courtiers:
At the White House, the Kremlin, and the Reichschancellery

by Russell Baker and Charles Peters

This article first appeared in 1971.

The analogy between the modern presidency and the royal European court, bewigged, bejeweled, and beset with intrigue, is not original with George Reedy, Lyndon Johnson's press secretary, but he is the first to alarm us with notice that court government is undergoing a twentieth-century rebirth in the White House. This renaissance of the princely court, Reedy insists, is breeding immense danger for American government, for much the same reason that the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century courts of Western Europe contributed to the development of violent revolutions.

In sheer body density alone, the insulation around the presidency has thickened rapidly. Herbert Hoover had a staff of only 42 persons. A generation later, General Eisenhower, who prided himself on taut administration, had more than 2,000.

The trappings of court began, simultaneously, to multiply. The custom-built carriages, magnificently engineered automobiles built expressly for the White House. Great ocean-spanning jets kept constantly at the ready. Presidential appearances were preceded and surrounded by the inevitable, ineffectual showing of the private presidential bodyguard. Security at the White House thickened.

By an extraordinary publishing coincidence, Reedy's memoir appears in the same year that Albert Speer and Nikita Khrushchev have given us their memoirs of life at the top in Germany and Russia.* Neither the Speer nor Khrushchev book concerns itself consciously with court life under Hitler and Stalin; yet, when they are read in context with Reedy, we are startled to discover that the styles of government being described by all three are remarkably alike.

At each court, for example, we find the leader, or prince, treated with a deference approaching reverence, which must inevitably tempt all but the humblest souls (who are rarely to be found running large states) to assume they possess a superiority bordering on divinity. Princes, whether monarchist,

* *The Twilight of the Presidency,* George E. Reedy—World. *Inside the Third Reich,* Albert Speer—Macmillan. *Khrushchev Remembers,* translated and edited by Strobe Talbott—Little, Brown.

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fascist, communist, or democratic, become accustomed to feeling like very special people.

Reedy writes of the White House:

"There is built into the presidency a series of devices that tend to remove the occupant of the Oval Room from all of the forces which require most men to rub up against the hard facts of life on a daily basis. The life of the White House is the life of a court. It is a structure designed for one purpose and one purpose only—to serve the material needs and the desires of a single man....

"He is treated with all the reverence due a monarch. No one interrupts presidential contemplation for anything less than a major catastrophe somewhere on the globe. No one speaks to him unless spoken to first. No one ever invites him to 'go soak your head' when his demands become petulant and unreasonable."

Speer found a similar condition under Hitler. He writes:

"There is a special trap for every holder of power....His favor is so desirable to his subordinates that they will sue for it by every means possible. Servility becomes endemic among his entourage, who compete among themselves in their show of devotion. This exercises a sway over the ruler who becomes corrupted in turn."

And in Moscow, at about the same time, Khrushchev and comrades were busily laboring to show Stalin that there was no duty more vital for them than humoring his whims. At the end of a brutally exhausting day, Khrushchev recalls:

"We would meet either in his study at the Kremlin or, more often, in the Kremlin movie theater. Stalin used to select the movies himself....When a movie ended, Stalin would suggest, 'Well, let's go get something to eat, why don't we?' By now it was usually one or two o'clock in the morning. It was time to go to bed....But everyone would say, yes, he was hungry, too. This lie was like a reflex. We would all get into our cars and drive to the dacha."

The prince, accustomed through the assurances of the courtiers to the sensation of being an extraordinary human being, becomes more difficult to deal with at certain times. One such time is the moment when an uncomfortable truth is delivered at the palace door. A courtier's first instinct is to protect the prince, and there are rationalizations for doing so in the unwritten court protocols.

There must be many of Lyndon Johnson's dukes and earls who, remembering the Vietnam years, would find it possible to sympathize with Hermann Goering's lines in an anecdote related by Speer.

About to board his train to leave Berlin, Goering was visited by General Adolf Galland. Goering took the occasion to reprimand Galland for having told Hitler that American fighter planes had penetrated German territory. Galland said they would soon by flying even deeper into Germany. "Fantasies!" Goering said. Galland said American fighters had already been shot down at Aachen. "Impossible!" said Goering. And yet, Galland insisted, the downed planes were at Aachen.

"Goering finally declared: 'What must have happened is that they were shot down much farther to the west. I mean, if they were very high when they were shot down they could have glided quite a distance farther before they crashed.'

"Not a muscle moved in Galland's face. 'Glided to the east, sir? If my plane were shot up...'

" 'Now then, Herr Galland,' Goering fulminated, trying to put an end to the debate, 'I officially assert that the American fighter planes did not reach Aachen.'

"The general ventured a last statement. 'But sir, they were there!'

"At this point Goering's self-control gave way. 'I herewith give you an official order that they weren't there! Do you understand? The American fighters were not there! Get that! I intend to report that to the Fuehrer.' "

It can't happen here? After the Sontay raid failed to discover a single American prisoner of war, much less rescue one, Secretary of Defense Melvin Laird went to the White House. What was this? A failure? Not at all, Laird explained. It had been a triumph for American intelligence.

Rather than disturb the prince by becoming the agent for bad news, and perhaps lose favor, the courtier elects to withhold information essential to realistic policy decisions. Or, to put it more bluntly, his own interests are placed above the interests of the prince and the state he professes to serve. Reedy, Khrushchev, and Speer give us comparable pictures of the advancing corruption created in the courtiers by their impulse to establish and protect their intimacy with the leader.

The White House assistants, writes Reedy, constitute "the greatest of all barriers to presidential access to reality." For them "...there is only one fixed goal in life. It is somehow to gain and maintain access to the president."

This world sounds remarkably like the court of King James I, at which the Catholic faction, knowing his weakness for handsome young men, kept thrusting a lovely young man of their choosing across the King's path, in hopes of obtaining the keys to the kingdom. In Johnson's White House, the technique, at least, must have been rather duller.

Speer found precisely the same principle at work around Hitler. Writing of Martin Bormann, his *bête noire*, he states:

"Bormann followed the simple principle of always remaining in closest proximity to the source of all

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Illustration by Vint Lawrence

grace and favor. He accompanied Hitler to the Berghof and on trips, and in the Chancellery never left his side until Hitler went to bed in the early morning hours."

"To be close to Stalin," Khrushchev remembers, "this seemed to be the crowning moment of my career."

Receiving the recognition and approval of the leader becomes a pleasure so powerful that the strongest of courtiers find it difficult to deny themselves. The empty-headed thrills that the younger Khrushchev and Speer derived from the notice of their leaders may be dismissed as the natural response of innocence in the presence of a celebrity. But what are we to make of the account of a National Security Council meeting under Lyndon Johnson, as recounted by Chester Cooper in *The Lost Crusade*? Cooper writes:

"The president, in due course, would announce his decision and then poll everyone in the room—council members, their assistants, and members of the White House and NSC staffs. 'Mr. Secretary, do you agree with the decision?' 'Yes, Mr. President.' 'Mr. X, do you agree?' 'I agree, Mr. President.' During the process I would frequently fall into a Walter Mitty-like fantasy: When my turn came I would rise to my feet slowly, look around the room and then directly at the president, and say very quietly and emphatically, 'Mr. President, gentlemen, I most definitely do *not* agree.' But I was removed from my trance when I heard the President's voice saying, 'Mr. Cooper, do you agree?' And out would come a 'Yes, Mr. President, I agree.'"

The courtier's need to please his leader often has disastrous consequences for the people on the other end of royal decisions. When the Russians surrounded Hitler's Sixth Army at Stalingrad, at a critical moment in World War II, a black reality began to threaten the Fuehrer's notion that the Wehrmacht could not be defeated. At the timed suggestion of a general, he was even considering an effort to save the Army by breaking out into a retreat until Reichmarshal Goering entered the room:

"Depressed, with a beseeching note in his voice, Hitler asked him: 'What about supplying Stalingrad by air?' Goering snapped to attention and declared solemnly: 'My leader! I personally guarantee the supplying of Stalingrad by air. You can rely on that.'"

His delusion of invincibility thus restored, Hitler would hear no more talk of retreat. He ordered the Sixth Army to stay and fight it out in Stalingrad, where it slowly faced extinction when Goering's promise proved totally fabricated—as everyone on the General Staff knew it would. Finally, a group of generals persuaded Chief of Staff Keitel to recommend to Hitler an evacuation of the Army's helpless survivors. It was the only sane thing to do, and Keitel promised that he would.

"Keitel strode emotionally toward him, pointed to the map, where a small remnant of the city was surrounded by thick red rings, and declared: 'Mein Fuehrer, we will hold that!'"

Bormann, Speer recalls, avoided long business trips and vacations for fear another would insinuate himself during the absence into Bormann's place.

Speer himself was not without skill at the struggle. Hitler often explained the elimination of important men on grounds that they were in ill health. Politicians, therefore, "pricked up their ears" when they heard of Hitler's associates being "sick." And so, to keep his profile discreetly low, Speer, even when he became "really sick," deemed it "advisable to remain as active as possible."

Khrushchev, referring to personal competition for favor in the Kremlin, describes Stalin's men as "tearing at each other's throats."

"The life of a courtier," Reedy comments, "is to be Sammy Glick or to fight Sammy Glick."

As all this suggests, the courtier-prince relationship is almost inevitably corrupting to both parties. Consider the relationship of John Kennedy and one of his finest courtiers, Kenneth O'Donnell. In his memoirs, published in *Life*, O'Donnell stated that Kennedy planned in 1963 to end the Vietnam war in 1965, after his reelection had been assured. O'Donnell, with his courtier's tendency to identify prince with state and place the welfare of ruler above all, saw nothing morally wrong, and to this day apparently fails to see anything out of order, with Ken-

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nedy's willingness to let men continue dying through 1963 and 1964 because it was politically awkward to end the war before assuring his own reelection.

What motivates the courtier? The need to function, the opportunity to use his talents, to prove his mastery of special skills. "I often ask myself what I would have done if I had recognized Hitler's real face and the true nature of the regime he had established," Speer said. "The answer was. . . my position as Hitler's architect had become indispensable. . . . I was in accord with the system so long as it permitted me to function effectively."

But the need to function is not the whole story. Note that Speer did not say "my position as architect," but rather, "my position as *Hitler's* architect" (our emphasis). This is finally what is most depressing of all: the compulsion of men to seek their identities in the gaudier identity of someone they perceive to be greater than they. It is the religious impulse perverted so that one's allegiance is to LBJ rather than to an idea of what the president should be.

Of course, most of us do not have a real prince to have faith in. We have evolved something like a prince-substitute, however, in the governmental and corporate bureaucracies: the universities, organized labor, foundations, with which so many of us are so unhappily familiar. Here we see the same principles that animate life at the great political courts. Speer's willingness to overlook Hitler's mass murders as irrelevant to his specialty is similar to Khrushchev's position on Stalin's purges.

And although these examples are perhaps more dramatic, the attitudes are identical to those of today's corporate specialist—say, the advertising men at General Motors, who didn't feel responsible for the unsafe cars produced by their company. Modern institutions remind us in other ways of the court—the elevation of the organization to suprahuman importance, the minuet of the courtiers, the increasing difficulty of perceiving reality.

A prophetic article in *The Observer* of London, written about Speer in 1944, is worth recalling for what is says about our own time.

"Speer is, in a sense, more important for Germany than Hitler, Himmler, Goering, Goebbels, or the generals. They all have, in a way, become the mere auxiliaries of the man who actually directs the giant power machine—charged with drawing from it the maximum effort under maximum strain. . . . In him is the very epitome of the 'managerial revolution.'

"Speer is not one of the flamboyant and picturesque Nazis. Whether he has any other than conventional political opinions at all is unknown. He might have joined any other political party which gave him a job and a career. He is very much the successful average man, well dressed, civil, noncorrupt, very middle class in his style of life, with a wife and six children. . . . [He] symbolizes a type which is becoming increasingly important in all belligerent countries: the pure technician, the classless bright young man without background, with no other original aim than to make his way in the world and no other means than his technical and managerial ability. It is the lack of psychological and spiritual ballast and the ease with which he handles the terrifying technical and organizational machinery of our age, which makes this slight type go extremely far nowadays. . . . This is their age; the Hitlers and Himmlers we may get rid of, but the Speers, whatever happens to this particular special man, will long be with us."

Speer's lament may already apply to thousands who have never dreamed of Nazism and serve as an epitaph for generations to come. "Years later, in Spandau," he writes, "I read Ernst Cassirer's comment on the men who of their own accord threw away man's highest privilege: to be an autonomous person.

"Now I was one of them." □

Firemen First or How to Beat a Budget Cut

by Charles Peters

This piece appeared in 1976.

Since parsimony is becoming almost as fashionable among politicians today as patriotism was in the 1940s, a wave of budget-cutting seems likely at all levels of government. The results could be salutary, but might be disastrous. To avoid the latter possibility, it is essential to understand how the Clever Bureaucrat reacts to the threat of fiscal deprivation. What the C.B. does, when threatened with a budget reduction, is translate it into bad news for those congressmen who have the power to restore his budget to its usual plenitude.

Thus Amtrak, when threatened with a budget cut,

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immediately announced that it would be compelled to drop the following routes:

San Francisco-Bakersfield, running through Stockton, the hometown of Rep. John J. McFall, chairman of the House Appropriations transportation subcommittee.

St. Louis-Laredo, running through Little Rock, Arkansas, the home of Senator John McClellan, chairman of the Senate Appropriations Committee.

Chicago-Seattle, running through the homes of Senator Mike Mansfield, senate majority leader, and Senator Warren Magnuson, chairman of the Senate Commerce Committee.

In the Amtrak case, the C.B.'s budget-cutting enemy was President Ford. Sometimes it is a frugal superior in the C.B.'s own department. His initial response is much the same. If, for example, a secretary of defense from Massachusetts insists upon eliminating useless and outmoded bases, the Navy's C.B. will respond with a list of recommended base-closings, headed by the Boston Navy Yard.

An irate constituency is, of course, a threat to all elected officials and to every other official who dreams of converting his appointive status into one blessed by the voting public. Thus, as Mike Causey of *The Washington Post* tells, a National Park Service C.B. who was confronted with a budget cut quickly restored congressmen to their senses by eliminating elevator service to the top of the Washington Monument. Parents whose children insisted on their walking all the way up would be sure to place an outraged call to their congressman. Similarly, you can be certain a Social Security Administration C.B. faced with a budget cut will announce that the result will be substantial delays in the mailing of Social Security checks.

Whenever possible, a C.B. will assert that the budget cut will definitely mean the loss of jobs. And of course the threatened employees are sure to write emotional protests to their congressmen. The C.B.'s concern about the loss of others' jobs is a deeply personal one. He knows you can't be a commander unless you have troops to command. Not long ago Jack Anderson discovered that the Navy, trying to adjust to less money than it had requested, was depriving the fleet of essential maintenance, while continuing to waste billions on useless supercarriers. The reason, of course, is that the more big ships with big crews we have, the more admirals we need.

Rank in the civil service is also determined in part by the number of employees one supervises. Thus, a threat to reduce their number is a threat not merely to the C.B.'s ego but to his income as well.

On the other hand, there are those we don't want to fire—teachers, for example, where teacher-pupil ratios of 1 to 40 are common. Yet they are the ones

Illustration by LaMouche

the C.B. says he must fire when he is menaced with a budget cut. This tactic is based on the principle that the public will support the C.B.'s valiant fight against the budget reduction only if essential services are endangered. Thus, the C.B. always picks the teachers, policemen, and firemen first.

John Lindsay, when confronted with a 1971-72 budget of only $8.6 billion, said he would have to fire 10,000 policemen, 2,500 firemen, 3,600 garbage workers, 12,000 hospital workers, and 10,800 teachers. In the end, he didn't have to fire anyone. Abe Beame was not so lucky. He threatened to fire 67,000 similarly essential employees, and—when the bastards actually cut his budget—found that he did have to drop 35,000.

There's the rub. If we cut the budget of the C.B. who has bluffed by saying that he will have to fire essential employees, he may—to preserve his credibility—actually have to fire them, instead of the middle-level newspaper-readers who are the real fat, which means we could end up with a government of planning analysts, friends of congressmen, and trains running to Bakersfield via Stockton. □

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Now You're Thinking Like a Lawyer

by Michael Kinsley

This piece appeared in 1975.

The popularity of legal careers requires no elaborate explanation. Lawyers run the country.

As a matter of fact, almost every major political reform of the past decade—with the significant exception of no-fault auto insurance—has had the important side effect of increasing business for lawyers. The Tax Reform Act of 1969 is known in professional circles as the "lawyers and accountants relief act," because of the wide areas of complicated litigation it opened up. The same could be said of the Freedom of Information Act, the campaign spending reform act, and the acts creating new regulatory commissions, such as the Environmental Protection Agency.

It would be absurd to suspect that this common feature of such disparate reforms—all associated with what has come to be called the "public interest law movement"—is the result of a conspiracy led by Ralph Nader and Senator John Tunney, secretly financed by the American Bar Association. But it would be equally absurd to write it off as a coincidence. It is actually the result, not of any overt conspiracy but of a process taught at all law schools across the country and known as "thinking like a lawyer." Thinking like a lawyer means believing that legal tools—primarily the adversary system—are ideally suited to solving all problems.

What the adversary system does is pit two sides against one another, with self-interest motivating their lawyers less toward the pursuit of truth and justice than toward the pursuit of victory. Between the lawyers stands a judge, who in the dominant tradition of American law is not a seeker after truth or justice either but rather a neutral referee seeking only to ensure that combatants obey the rules of fair play.

It is possible for disputes to be handled otherwise—by judges who do seek justice and truth (as they do in England in at least some cases), who keep lawyers out of their courtrooms and take responsibility themselves for protecting each party's rights (as they do in a few American small claims courts). It is also possible for disputes to be handled by mediators who seek solutions that are fair to both sides and that will enable the disputants to go forward as friends rather than enemies.

But lawyers are doing very little to encourage any solution of disputes outside the adversary system. When the Los Angeles County Bar Association attempted to provide arbitration of disputes between attorneys and their clients, the lawyers refused arbitration more than half the time.

Death brings out what would seem to be an inevitable need for lawyers. You need a lawyer when you make a will and your family may need a lawyer when you die. But even these real needs are not as great as the legal profession would have you believe. Most wills, for example, are almost all "boiler plate"—chunks of colorful but standardized verbiage required, where simple declarative sentences might otherwise do, to satisfy the voodooistic needs of the legal profession. Determining which chunks of boiler plate you need is usually a simple process that could be done quite cheaply by walk-in clinics. As for probate, Wisconsin is the first state in the country with a do-it-yourself probate law. It permits you to settle your parents' or your spouse's estate without paying thousands of dollars to lawyers, as you do in most states. Naturally it was opposed by the state bar.

The other occasions when everyman needs a lawyer are divorce and auto accidents. Both can be solved by the no-fault concept. Under the adversary concept in divorce cases, every Othello not only must suffer an Iago but must pay him for his services. Desdemona must do the same. Under no-fault, simple forms are filed with the court and a divorce may be obtained without involving the parties in life-long hatred of each other.

The auto accident is the most absurd situation of all for adversary proceedings. Remember the word is "accident." No one did it deliberately or recklessly—if someone did, there would be criminal prosecution. In the typical "accident" case, each party is trying to prove the other was at fault when no one was really at fault. This involves both parties in lying, which in turn makes them hate the other guy even more. In no case does our righteous anger against the lies of another mount to such heights as when we are lying, too.

This particular charm of the adversary system was well illustrated in a recent corporations class at Harvard Law School. The professor proposed a "hypothetical": Two men want to buy a photography business owned by a third man. Although they have not settled on the exact price, all three are amicably agreed on the general contours of the deal. They come to you to write up a contract for them. What's the first thing you should do? The answer: send

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WHO'S WHO

The appointment of **John Tower** as secretary of defense and of **Brent Scowcroft** as national security adviser are said to reflect **George Bush**'s gratitude for their incuriosity as members of the Tower Commission about his role in the Iran-contra affair. The commission's report let Bush off the hook even though, as **Jane Mayer** and **Doyle McManus** point out in *Landslide*, the book they wrote about the affair, "He had the entire deal laid before him in clear unsparing terms but. . . raised no objections."

Another Bush appointment that may have been a reward for incuriosity is that of **Robert Gates** as deputy national security adviser. When he testified about his response, when he was a deputy director of the CIA, to a warning from a subordinate about Iran-contra, he said his reaction was that he "didn't want to hear any more about it.". . .

One person who could implicate George Bush in Iran-contra, **Donald Gregg**, his national security adviser during the vice presidency, is being dispatched as far away from potential investigators as possible, half-way around the world in fact, as ambassador to South Korea. . . .

Did you know that there is a senator who likes to be whipped? No, not politically, but in S&M. Or that a Reagan ambassador kept her lesbian lover stashed away in the embassy? The reporters who know about these cases have presumably—and we think properly—decided not to disclose them. . . .

A similar decision was apparently made by the press in the case of the rumored long-term romance between **Jennifer Fitzgerald**, who has just been appointed deputy chief of protocol, and George Bush. This may become known as the One Affair Rule. One affair, the media must reason, is not that bad in an era of compulsive sex addicts like **Gary Hart**. We accept this view, but regret that the same standards are not applied to **Henry Cisneros**, the liberal mayor of San Antonio whose one known affair *was* disclosed by the press last fall, and that a fear that he would be treated like Cisneros instead of Bush, led, as we reported last year, one extremely capable Democratic senator not to run for president.

What worries veteran observers here much more than whether George Bush had an affair with Fitzgerald is his overreaction to leaks. They recall the trouble that **Richard Nixon** got into with his "plumbers"—remember they were organized to halt leaks—and are dismayed by a report in *The Washington Post* that Bush "went bananas" over a harmless leak. A president will learn more from leaks than he is harmed by them, and, except for those that involve genuine military and intelligence secrets, it is foolish to fret about them. . . .

Unfortunately, **Lauro Cavazos**, the secretary of education, seems to have the same problem as Bush. His chief of staff, **Bill Phillips**, is said by a *Washington Times* source to have gone on a rampage about leaks. "He's screaming at people, threatening to monitor phone calls." To the best of our knowledge, there are no secret submarine plans in the offices of the Department of Education. . . .

It appears that **John Sununu** is being surrounded. Three of his top aides are Bush loyalists, unlike **Donald Regan**'s "mice," who were dedicated to Regan, not Reagan. . . .

In—*White House:* President—**George Bush.** Vice President—**Dan Quayle.** Cabinet secretary—**David Q. Bates.** Staff secretary—**James A. Cicconi.** Deputy National Security Adviser—**Robert M. Gates.** Chief of Staff for the Vice President—**Bill Kristol.** Chief of Protocol—**Joseph V. Reed Jr.** *State:* Deputy Secretary—**Lawrence S. Eagleburger.** Assistant Secretary for Public Affairs—**Margaret D. Tutwiler.** Assistant Secretary for Legislative Affairs—**Janet G. Mullins.** Assistant Secretary for East Asian and Pacific Affairs—**James Lilley.** Ambassador to West Germany—**Vernon A. Walters.** Ambassador to Britain—**Henry E. Catto.** Ambassador to South Korea—**Donald P. Gregg.** Counselor—**Robert B. Zoellick.** Director of Policy Planning Staff—**Dennis B. Ross.**

Out—*White House: President*—**Ronald W. Reagan.**

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either the buyers or the seller out to get another lawyer because for one lawyer to represent all of them would be a "conflict of interest." The class was divided down the middle aisle, with each half of the room assigned to represent one party to the deal. By near the end of the hour, several promising areas of discord had developed. The last few minutes were spent discussing whether the two buyers shouldn't really have had separate lawyers as well. As we put it in 1974, if paranoia is the major mental disorder of America, lawyers are its Typhoid Marys.

If, as it is moderately popular to suppose, the United States has passed its zenith and entered a long period of decline, anthropologists of the next century will look back in amazement at an arrangement whereby the most ambitious and brightest members of each generation were siphoned off the productive work force, trained to think like a lawyer, and put to work chasing one another around in circles; where, as things got worse and worse, social reformers, cured by the Republicans of the habit of trying to solve all problems by throwing money at them, took to throwing lawyers at them instead; and where the portion of the population that went through a typical year happily oblivious of the legal profession slipped from two-thirds to one-half, to a quarter, to none at all. □

Yes, But Where Are Your Credits in Recess Management 101?

by Susan Ohanian

The Monthly *hasn't just dispatched reporter/anthropologists to cover bureaucratic culture—we've asked the natives to tell their stories. This piece ran in 1984.*

We've all heard about the sorry state of the teaching profession. No fewer than a half-dozen national commissions have given their assessments of our public schools within the past year, and the poor training and the quality of our teachers have figured prominently in their criticisms.

I do not agree with the emphasis many of my colleagues put on the usual culprits when they try to explain why talented people shun the profession and why the best teachers are usually the first to leave. Low pay, burnout, pushy parents, incompetent administrators, and apathetic kids are certainly problems. But something else has driven me to distraction—more specifically, a group I'll call the High Priests of Certification.

Who are the High Priests? They come in many guises—as school administrators, state government bureaucrats, even union officials. They mouth a common goal: to protect the citizenry from unqualified, incompetent teachers. It's a noble purpose. But having experienced firsthand the High Priests' obsession with enforcing irrelevant regulations and their zeal for bureaucratic pettifoggery, I've reached an opposite conclusion. The High Priests' activities seem to be one of the major reasons such teachers never get near a classroom—or decide to leave the profession altogether.

My acquaintance with them goes back a long way. In the mid-1960s, I answered a newspaper plea for high school English teachers. The ad used the word "crisis," but I soon discovered that New York City's Board of Education was not so desperate as to think that my master's degree in English literature qualified me to teach. The examiner acted annoyed that I was wasting his time; don't come back, he told me, until I had the 13 units in education required to get an emergency teaching certificate.

I began the classes. For one year, four nights a week, I listened to such discussions as an overview of American education up to 1914, taught by a professor who poured his energy into constructing multiple-choice exams. One professor instructed us in the psychology of the adolescent—without once mentioning sex. In another class, we spent the term rewriting Greek myths.

Perhaps my most memorable class taught me how to pass out paper. To my professor, mismanaged paper distribution was apparently the first step toward anarchy, and he insisted that mastery of his technique would make or break a teacher. People who've never taken an education course think I'm joking when I tell this story, but it's true. In fact, the tips on paper distribution were the only practical things I encountered that year of night school.

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The Editor's Favorite Lines

The last sentence of "Now You're Thinking Like a Lawyer," is one of the greats, but so are these. In a 1971 article, "The Senate's Lame Doves," John Rothchild took the antiwar senators to task for their failure to vote against the appropriations that financed U.S. forces in Vietnam:

"There is that vision of a battlefield with a few brave young Americans surrounded by a closing knot of North Vietnamese, while a credit adjustor slips through the enemy lines to repossess our guns and declare, 'Senator X wouldn't pay for these.'"

In 1978, Michael Kinsley exposed the danger of oversimplifying the conflict-of-interest problem:

"Is it a conflict of interest for a mother to have a second child?"

So I completed my education classes and was certified by New York City to teach English. I taught for a year in a high school in Queens, where I quickly discovered that all the theory I'd learned in my education courses was as useful as a water pistol in a gang fight. (I also learned that the paper distribution technique I'd learned worked only with straight rows, and I wasn't a straight row teacher.)

I left Queens and moved to central New Jersey when I got married. It was there that I had my next encounter with the High Priests of Certification. I applied to every village, hamlet, and town I could think of, and while many had openings, none would allow me to teach. The problem was that I had never been a student teacher. "But I've taught, really taught," I protested, describing my harrowing year in the urban high school. The looks of withering scorn that I received from more than one interviewer made it clear that this wasn't worth discussing.

In 1969 I moved to Troy, in upstate New York, and applied for a job in the public schools. I quickly learned that I had several strikes against me. The first was that I'd taught college English. "You'd be too intellectual for us," the local superintendent informed me. A second demerit was that my undergraduate and graduate degrees were not in education. When the superintendent discovered that my degree in medieval literature was from Berkeley, my fate was sealed. "You'd be too intellectual *and* too radical for us," he proclaimed.

But I persisted. Less than a week before school started I was in the district office, applying for work as a substitute, when I heard that some state funding had come through for a new, experimental program in remedial reading. The superintendent hired me on the spot because of my experience in Queens working with "those colored kiddos." It didn't seem to bother him that I had no experience teaching seventh graders or remedial reading.

My subsequent years taught me that this kind of teaching made me happiest. In all modesty, I also had some talent for it. In 1973 I was given tenure, and the next year I was named Teacher of the Year in Troy. I went on to become one of five finalists in New York's Teacher of the Year program. But the good times were not to last. An administrator who had a way with words informed me that my program had been "liquidated."

It was at this point that my problems with the High Priests of Certification really began. They wanted me to spend a semester student teaching and take two more education courses *in reading*. "But I've taught reading for 13 years," I protested. "You can't enter an elementary classroom without six more units in reading," the examiner told me.

So I had to take some reading courses. What kind? This only added insult to injury: the bureau couldn't have cared less. In fact, the classes didn't even remotely involve reading instruction for elementary school children. If I could find an accredited course in teaching Serbo-Croatian folk tales to left-handed senior citizens of Aleutian descent, that would be just fine. All that mattered was that the class have a course code that belonged to a university department of reading.

There's one final irony. For all the hassle and for all the certification requirements, none of the administrators or state examiners that I've mentioned has ever seen me teach. For all they know, I could be the best teacher in New York State—or the worst. □

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What Happens to a Senator's Day

by James Boyd

This piece appeared in 1969.

Let us examine an average senator's day to see how his time is spent.

The senator starts his typical day tired. He returned very late last night from a speech back home, and he had to get up early this morning to present himself at a breakfast sponsored by utility executives. ("These guys come here mostly for a good time, but to make it look official, they nail me for an hour when I can't claim a conflicting engagement.") In the gray light of the cab he gives his *New York Times* a ten-minute reading, hoping that his aides will let him know if anything important happened yesterday. The breakfast is a bore, naturally, but he hopes he convinced those Republican businessmen that he is one Democrat who understands their problems.

He arrives at his office at 9:30, already 30 minutes late, grousing to himself about the three hurried minutes it takes to get down the long corridor. ("After another term, I'll be better situated.") He goes in through his private door, so visitors won't see him. He has the usual committee meeting scheduled at 10 o'clock, and he remembers that yesterday he tried to accommodate his legislative assistant by agreeing to be briefed for half an hour on everything under consideration by the committee.

But a check confirms his suspicion: his waiting room is crowded with people he can't ignore. He apologizes to his assistant and tells his secretary to "run them in." One of them helped him in an election back in the dim past. ("He just wants to say hello and show his wife that he has entree to a senator's office.") Then there is a delegation of union people who contributed to his campaign last time. They want to let him know they are watching what he does on that compulsory arbitration bill.

By now the hearing has started. But there are more constituents, or self-proclaimed representatives of constituents, to be seen. He greets them, one after another, listens, nodding agreeably for a few minutes, and turns them over to his executive aides. But he worries. He gets a lot of votes by helping constituents, and this service is one of his major assets during campaigns. He knows it takes up half the time of his staff, time that he needs for help on the issues. And besides, even though he helps these people, he knows that most of the things they ask are wrong or antithetical to the public interest.

If a call from his office to the Veterans Administration causes the disability file of John Jones to be pulled from the middle of the pile and placed on top, it only means that all the others are set back one. Jones doesn't care about the others, of course, and the others won't find out, but it's a funny way to run a country.

It is past 11 o'clock when he gets to the committee hearing. During the walk over, his legislative assistant gives him a hurried, capsule briefing, just enough to confuse him. In the hearing he asks the wrong questions. So do other senators who come and go every few minutes. The questions that get to the heart of the matter are so rare as to seem accidental, and the needed follow-up question is almost never asked. By ten minutes of 12:00 he has picked up the thread, but it's time to get to the Senate floor to insert into the *Congressional Record* a number of press releases just handed him by his head speechwriter. ("If I get there late, I'll be late for lunch with my campaign finance chairman. *He* can't be kept waiting.")

There are two afternoon committee sessions. He goes to the one that's being televised. As for the other, a closed session where legislation is being drafted, he sends his proxy to the chairman. By 4 o'clock he leaves the televised hearing (the camera has been shut off) to have his picture taken on the Capitol steps with a high-school class from back home. Afterwards he takes them into the Senate Reception Room, makes a little speech, shakes hands, and presents each visitor with an embossed ball-point pen. ("They'll all be voters in three or four years, and their parents are voters now.")

He is late for his 4:30 appointment at NASA, but he knows that the top men there will wait for a senator. ("Come to think of it, why didn't I have the meeting scheduled in my own office?") He is accompanied by businessmen from his state who are bidding for a government contract. The meeting is mercifully short. ("I loused up my presentation, but I gave them that I'll remember-at-appropriation-time look and I don't think they'll give me the run-around again.") Lobbying for businessmen eats up his time in great chunks. He sometimes feels that he is forever appearing before a regulatory commission or testifying before the Senate Appropriations Committee at the behest of some business or other.

Back in the office at 5:45 for some paper work—

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but his secretary hands him a list of 20 phone calls that must be returned. He picks out six from the array of home-state politicians, reporters, and contributors; he turns the rest over to his administrative assistant. He finishes the calls at 6:30 and asks his staff in. They have been waiting for a crack at him all day on matters they think are urgent. But those matters must wait; today is the last day he can name his state's quota to West Point. Awash in papers, he starts trying to balance the grades of boys he doesn't know against the recommendations of people he owes favors. He finally scribbles the prescribed number of names, and that's that.

By now his aides can tell from his gray countenance that he is bushed, so they don't press him for decisions. Everyone has a drink or two, the talk is pleasant and general, and gradually the chief's energy revives. His cleaning is brought in and he changes. He has dinner scheduled tonight with a columnist who has seven outlets in his state. ("I'd better not have that third drink.") And after that, he has promised to take his wife to an embassy party. He hates the thought of it, but he hasn't seen her for three nights, and tomorrow night he will be speaking for a $1,500 fee in Pennsylvania. ("She's always telling me how tired I look and how I ought to slow down and get some rest, but she sure likes those parties.") Maybe when he gets home, around midnight, he'll take an hour to dig into his briefcase, to read that material on the population explosion, on a new idea for housing in the ghetto, on the missile defense system, on the currency crisis, on the nuclear proliferation treaty. Yes, he's been trying to get to that briefcase for days. □

Europe on $233 Million a Day

by Joseph Nocera

This piece appeared in 1979.

In the culture of the foreign service, the subject of European assignments occupies a special niche. Who, after all, doesn't long to be sent sometime in his life to Paris or London or Rome or any of the other great cities of Western Europe? The lure is obvious—it's living, first of all, in The Developed World, which, as any foreign service officer knows, means toilets that flush, telephones that work, and hot and cold running water. There are large swatches of the globe where that isn't the case. There are also all the wonderful things to do that come with living in Europe—the great museums and cathedrals to visit; the pleasant weekends spent in the countryside searching for (and invariably finding) the perfect little provincial *auberge*.

But in the long run, what has been good for the lives and careers of the "Europhiles" has not necessarily been what is good for the country. An entire area of foreign policy—our European policy—has not been seriously examined or questioned since World War II. By this, of course, I don't suggest that there hasn't been discussion of "the problems of the Western Alliance" and so on; indeed, few foreign policy topics are more frequently discussed than those having to do with Europe. What I mean is that the underlying dogma upon which the U.S.-Europe relationship is based—a dogma that was devised some 35 years ago—has almost never been questioned since.

When was the last time the foreign policy establishment took a fresh look at whether it still makes sense even to *have* a joint Western defense or a NATO umbrella? Or whether it was really in America's best interest to continue spending upwards of $81 billion a year to keep NATO in business? That isn't happening, largely because the people who are in a position to question the dogma are the ones so tied to it. These people include not only the diplomats who live and work in Europe but the journalists who write from there, the military brass who operate from there, and even the congressmen who junket there.

Take the military. The military saw in NATO a chance to get in on the same kind of career and lifestyle benefits that their brethren in the foreign service had enjoyed for so long. Bases would have to be established in cities and towns all over Italy and France, Germany and Belgium. There would be a new, sudden need for military liaison officers stationed hither and yon, and military outposts where up-and-coming colonels could "consult" and "study" with their Italian counterparts. Being in Europe would no doubt turn out to be a great ticket-punch, while providing that same style of living that embassy staffers had grown so fond of. Indeed, in some cases, the military did the foreign service one better by establishing ports, as the Navy did, in towns like Villefranche—which may well be the most

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picturesque city on the Rivieria.

Probably the officers involved in choosing Villefranche as a navy port could list a half-dozen iron-clad strategic reasons for doing so. And if the navy ships were lit up each night in the harbor, well that, too, was surely done for reasons of security—it was only *incidental* that lit ships added immeasurably to the ambiance of the Villefranche scenery.

Congressmen, likewise, find Europe irresistible. In 1980, 75 of them made hard-hitting, fact-finding trips to England, and 71 made trips to France. In contrast, only seven visited Saudi Arabia. To make sure their correspondents are where the action is, newspapers have stationed their foreign affairs heavyweights, like Flora Lewis and R.W. Apple and Len Downie, in Paris and London, too. What kind of big news is there left to be written in Paris and London? Well, you can interview visiting congressmen. □

So Hard to Remember, So Easy to Forget

by William and Elizabeth Paddock

In the military and foreign service agencies, people seldom serve at a post for more than three years. One reason is to prepare everyone to be chief of staff or secretary of state. Another is to reward those who serve in hardship posts with assignments to Paris or Rome. But the result is to erase institutional memory, as the Paddocks found out when they returned to Guatemala to visit an AID mission where he had once worked. This article appeared in 1973.

Paddock: I understand Barcenas includes the forestry school the U.S. government helped establish ten years ago and later helped merge with the agricultural school there.

Hinton: I don't know anything about that. You must remember that I have only been here 15 months. There is a lot about previous programs I don't know.

Paddock: Is any money going into the experiment station at Barcenas?

Hinton: What experiment station? There is no experiment station there in the sense any of us would think of one. It's a work farm for the Barcenas students. . . .

Paddock: I don't mean the school's farm. I mean the experiment station. When I worked here in the 1950s this and the station at Chocola formed a major U.S. government effort. . . .

Hinton: I know nothing about it. I'm still learning. □

35 Ways to Cut the Defense Budget

by Phil Keisling and Jonathan Alter

At the time we began publishing in 1969, there was not one liberal democrat in the Congress who took a truly responsible attitude toward national defense—asking what works and what doesn't and what the nation really needs. Defense was not a fashionable issue among liberals because of their opposition to Vietnam. It was remarkable, then, in 1969 when Robert Benson told Monthly *readers of his "modest proposal"—an outline of how $9 billion (which was worth something at the time) could be cut from the Pentagon budget without reducing our national security.*

But the need for defense reform was vital then and remains so today: we need a Navy that won't be hamstrung by a few Iranian mines and an Army whose troop carriers don't sink when they're supposed to float, as in the Bradley fighting vehicle. We also need to save these exorbitant sums to put them into things that are important—whether it's civilian needs or more of the weapons we really need, like

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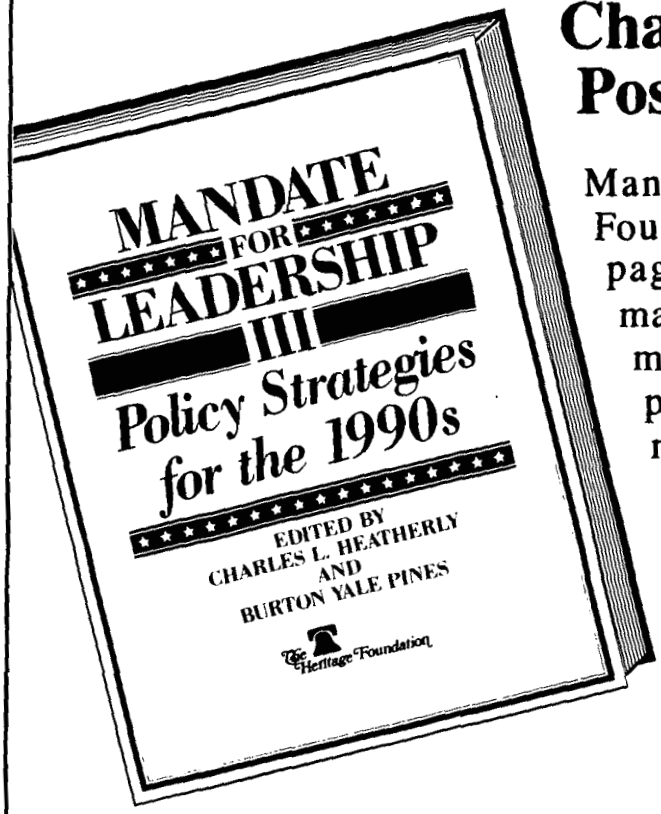
"I can say that for my own purpose, I often rely on The Heritage Foundation to provide the kind of quality research and analysis one finds in few other places," *George Bush.*

Meeting the Challenges of the Post-Reagan Era



Mandate III, The Heritage Foundation's ambitious 953-page, 37-chapter policy manual is a bold blueprint for meeting the challenges of the post-Reagan era. Mandate I made the *Washington Post* bestseller list; Mandate II was described by *TIME* as " ... a sweeping study."

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cheaper, smaller, quieter submarines.

We've tried to do more than just offer a list of do's and don'ts for the Pentagon. We've tried to go after the culture of the Pentagon—how forces like the need to protect, defend, and increase budgets have made well-intentioned men and women turn out so many lousy weapons.

In 1982, Jonathan Alter and Phil Keisling's enormous piece chronicled 35 specific ways to cut the defense budget without injuring American security. What's amazing is that papers like The Washington Post *and* The New York Times, *with the same information and far more resources than two young editors, didn't publish similar pieces.*

How can more money equal less defense? The answer, as many have been discovering, is that the enormous sums too often are devoted to small numbers of highly sophisticated weapons. We are putting too many of our eggs in too few baskets. The more money we spend, the fewer planes, submarines, and tanks we seem to get. But it is increasingly clear that the so-called "quantity versus quality" debate does not convey the whole story. Often, large numbers of simple, practical weapons are preferable to small numbers of complex ones, not only because they are cheaper and more effective *en masse* but because even *one-to-one* the simpler weapons work better.

Our argument for large-scale cancellation will cut our losses. Even some sophisticated members of Congress and the press don't understand that even weapons already in the pipeline can be cancelled with enormous savings. The government is liable only for lost profits and expenses incurred, which are usually far less than the face amount of the contract. It's time to stop throwing good money after bad and start providing an incentive for the right kind of performance by the defense industry. As Alain Enthoven, one of Robert McNamara's "whiz kids" puts it, "Without the clear and present danger of cancellation, it is very hard to get contractors to even begin to control costs."

It's also important to understand that cost overruns, as egregious as they are, are not at the root of our defense problems. Too often they serve as a handy way for liberals to jump into the defense debate without becoming involved in the more difficult issue of whether particular weapons and other elements of the defense program are working as they should. This requires a sustained effort to learn about "probability of kill," depot management, and all sorts of other things many people don't find very appealing or interesting. Of course, if that effort is not made, the nation will have no choice but to accept the judgment and assumptions of those who believe the way to make the military perform is to throw money at it.

On the other hand, if we can bring ourselves to look closely at these problems, substantial savings are possible, not only in weaponry, but in the more prosaic realm of paychecks, airplane hangars, army bases, and the like.

So it's up to Congress to delve into the *specifics* of how defense money is spent and not rely just on across-the-board increases or decreases of this percentage or that. *[Several of the authors' suggestions have been accepted but many more remain to be dealt with including these two:]*

Cancel the AEGIS Cruiser

At better than a billion dollars a pop, these air defense vessels cannot possibly be acquired in enough quantity to perform their mission—defense of aircraft carrier groups. This is true even if the Navy doesn't go to large numbers of carriers. The Navy, defying such logic, is asking for three AEGIS cruisers next year and 17 eventually. That will account for a sizable percentage of its budget for ships.

But there's another problem: the high-tech systems that make the AEGIS so outrageously expensive also make it highly vulnerable to attack. This is the great irony of advanced radar technology—it turns weapons into targets instead of shields. AEGIS will become the brightest target in the sea, allowing, according to Senator Gary Hart's aide, Bill Lind, radar-homing missiles to lock onto it quite easily. A much better, and cheaper, idea would be to equip all naval vessels—from fighters to carriers—with their own anti-aircraft and anti-missile weapons. That way carriers would no longer be dependent on such expensive accessories.

Budget authority savings FY 1983	**$3 billion**
Total program savings	**$22.2 billion**

Reduce the Size of the Officer Corps

Today there are eight times as many admirals per ship as there were at the end of World War II and seven times as many air force generals per plane.

While the World War II ratio is unrealistic in peacetime, the 1964 standard of seven enlisted men to one officer seems reasonable, especially since there are far fewer planes, ships, and tanks today. Adhering to this ratio would reduce the current 290,000-person officer corps to 260,000. Yet the Pentagon actually has worsened the problem by increasing the number of ROTC scholarships, some of

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which cost the government more than $10,000 a year, from 80,000 to 110,000 since 1979. And between 1981 and 1983 Reagan projects the number of officers will grow at nearly twice the rate as enlisted men. Congress should cut the scholarships immediately; reducing the number of officers through attrition will take several years.

Budget authority savings FY 1983 $250 million
Total program savings $2.5 billion □

All Aboard Air Oblivion

by Gregg Easterbrook

Gregg Easterbrook's 1981 piece was more than a pointed, technically sophisticated critique of our Army's helicopter force. It showed how the bureaucratic culture of the Pentagon gives us weapons we don't need.

Today the United States Army has a bigger air force than the Air Force—second largest in the world, in fact, trailing only the Soviet air force. The Army's air force is composed almost entirely of helicopters, 9,000 of them. (The Air Force has 7,000 aircraft, very few of which are helicopters.) America has more helicopters, and spends more money on helicopters, and is betting more of its security on helicopters, than any other nation.

Yet most of today's helicopter Army would not exist at all were it not for interservice rivalries. Army helicopter development began in earnest after the Air Force was split away from the Army, and new regulations barred the Army from having any airplanes. But the Army needed airplanes. It needed them to transport troops and equipment, and for "close support" attacks against enemy tanks during the heat of battle. The new Air Force was supposed to perform these tasks. It didn't. Desperate, the Army turned to helicopters—something it *was* allowed to have—to move its men and protect them from the air.

And these thousands of helicopters are, militarily and economically, a disaster area. Helicopters are fine for certain specialized military purposes—medical evacuation, rescue, commando raids, antisubmarine patrols, and terrorizing defenseless peasants (Russian helicopters in Afghanistan have been employed mainly for terror attacks). But in the two missions for which most army helicopters are built, front line transport and "close support," the machines are a fiasco.

Vietnam (sometimes called the "helicopter war") demonstrated how shockingly vulnerable helicopters were to even light opposition. At the height of Vietnam, the Army was losing one-third of its helicopter force *per year*, informed Pentagon officials say. These losses were not to flak batteries or sophisticated missiles but to "small arms fire," meaning infantry rifles.

Why is so much money being spent on a weapon of such limited practical value? One reason is that the helicopter has developed powerful institutional momentum. Four of the nation's largest defense contractors (Bell Textron, Boeing, Hughes, and United Technologies) have devoted significant resources to helicopter construction and agitate constantly for new contracts.

But much more important is the Army-Air Force rivalry. The Army's petty generals like helicopters simply because they are green and fly, and can be used to torment the Air Force during budget battles. Its sincere generals, knowing the Air Force's dismal record of support for army troops, feel they would rather take their chances with their own pilots and machines, even if those machines are inferior.

Unarmed dumbos

The 1950s proved to be an almost unbroken string of bureaucratic victories for the Air Force. After starting life with the old Army Air Corps's "tactical" missions and the new atomic bombing mission, it also walked away with most of the big missiles. Nearly every exciting (and expensive) new technical challenge—giant jet bombers, ICBMs, supersonic fighters—went to the Air Force, which replaced the Navy ("join the Navy and see the world") as the country's glamor service.

Many of the military's new bureaucratic turf lines were drawn at a series of high-level meetings that began at Key West in 1948. The Air Force, riding a crest of prestige, would control any "fixed-wing aircraft" heavier than 5,000 pounds. The Key West agreements, however, placed few restrictions on control of "rotary-winged aircraft," meaning helicopters.

For all its other faults, the Air Force understood something essential about the helicopter: it is the most inefficient, improbable way to fly ever devised.

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Have You Got What It Takes to Write for The Washington Monthly?

by Arthur Levine

Writers for The Washington Monthly *sometimes complain that we're a little too, shall we say, uninhibited, about urging our point of view upon them—and their manuscripts. In 1979, Arthur Levine mocked the* Monthly*'s editing style.*

"How can *I* become a *Washington Monthly* writer? I can't write for beans, I'm dull as dishwater, I hate researching, and I don't have any strongly held political opinions. Could I get published in your magazine?"

Welcome aboard! Our top-notch editors will be glad to add an introduction, a conclusion, and loads of *thought-provoking opinions* without troubling you with the dreary task of doing it yourself. Many contented writers have said that there's no surprise quite like seeing a manuscript of theirs end up as an article in *The Washington Monthly.* Often they find themselves espousing ideas they've never even heard of, let alone agree with.

Let's take the underlying approach. The magazine bills itself as "the liberal magazine that challenges liberal orthodoxy." In other words, we are practically indistinguishable from *National Review*, except that our readership is made up of average, white, educated liberals. All articles should be written with this reader in mind: He's just come home from work, he's tired, and he's wading through a pile of liberal magazines. You only have a brief moment to catch his attention. What to do?

Challenge his assumptions! That's right, kick him in the shins. Take whatever he holds dear and tell him that he's wrong.

Your best bet is to stick to widely held assumptions. Let's take Nazi Germany. Your readers probably think the Nazi regime was the most evil in world history. At the *Monthly*, we say, "Hey, not so fast! Let's take another look." Here's a sample of the way some top *Washington Monthly* writers might approach this all-important issue:

"Busting Our Mental Blocks on Hitler"—Contributing editor Tom Bethell argues that the sins of Adolf Hitler have been wildly exaggerated by the liberal media over the years, especially by *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post.* Highlights of the piece include his witty, scathing attacks on Anne Frank and Eli Weisel. He ends with a ringing denunciation of government bureaucracy.

"How Many Jews Did You Kill in the War, Daddy?"—In this sensitive first-person account, James Fallows apologizes for causing World War II. He explains how a Harvard-educated elite and the American class system helped Hitler in his rise to power and led to the invasion of Czechoslovakia.

"What Liberals Can Learn From the Krupp Family"—Editor Charles Peters hails the entrepreneurial spirit of Germany's leading munitions makers. In the face of government paperwork and the seductions of play-it-safe manufacturing, this plucky family nonetheless invented new bombs to aid their country in its time of need. Peters gives the family high marks for altruism and patriotism, qualities he finds sorely lacking in today's society. He ends with a ringing denunciation of government bureaucracy.

People always say, "How do you folks at the *Monthly* keep coming up with those new story ideas all the time?" What these people don't know is that we don't really come up with new ideas, but *different ways to say the same thing over and over again.*

Well, I've given you everything you need. Now it's up to you. Are you willing to take the risk? If not, that may be because our society hasn't provided the kind of support—in our political system, our schools, and in our culture—that's necessary to encourage that sort of risk-taking. We've gone from a nation of vigorous entrepreneurs to a nation of timid bureaucrats, each obsessed with preserving his security in the miasma of special-interest politics. Ultimately, the real irony may be that the values that made this country great blah blah blah. . . .What we need, in these times, is a rebirth. . . .etc. etc.

(Note to editor: Can't think of an ending, I know you'll come up with something.) □

Arthur Levine, a contributing editor of The Washington Monthly, *is an associate editor of* U.S. News & World Report.

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TIDBITS AND OUTRAGES

THE RIGHT STUFF

In Maryland, planes flying into Andrews Air Force base were ordered to steer clear of the home of General Bernard Randolph, after he complained of the noise.

THEN THEY BROKE PAST FOUR GUARDS BY DOUSING THEIR EYES WITH CHANEL NO. 5

In Dallas, four inmates escaped from the new $69 million county prison after cutting through a fence with toenail clippers.

HEY, THESE THINGS HAPPEN

In Texas, Steve Woolverton won a $1.5 million suit against Sister Mary Kregar and the Catholic diocese of Brownsville after the judge ruled his marriage was destroyed by a lesbian nun who seduced his wife.

HOWEVER YOU NO LONGER NEED TO GO TO THE ZONING COMMISSION BEFORE BUILDING A SNOWMAN

East Orange, New Jersey requires those moving in or out of town to pay the police $30 for permission.

FI BETA KAPPA

The University of Wisconsin awarded nearly 4,000 diplomas in May that misspelled the name of the state.

CLASS ACT

An ad for Virgin Airlines reads: "Does company policy prevent you from enjoying all the comforts and extras of flying First Class to London? If so, why not enjoy all those comforts and extras anyway? In Virgin's business class. Like our roomy stand-up bar, complimentary drinks and superb gourmet meals, and everything else you might only expect with a first-class seat. So why don't we just call it first class?. . . We want to help you, how shall we say. . . bend the rules."

WHAT A RELIEF

The New York Times Magazine recently wrote: "Looking rich is still respectable, albeit with some casual twists."

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The helicopter's inherent aerodynamic and mechanical drawbacks result in its consuming about three times as much fuel, per weight carried and distance traveled, as an airplane. For most purposes, aircraft designers say, times-three is a valid rule: anything you can do with an airplane will cost you three times as much to do with a helicopter.

At Key West the Air Force promised to fulfill the Army's aerial needs, transport and close-support attacks on tanks. The Army had little choice but to take the Air Force's word. But in fact, notes one retired air force colonel, "We accepted those missions solely to keep them away from the Army. We had no intention of sinking our budget into things we didn't like."

Transport planes are lumbering, unarmed dumbos that do nothing to advance the Air Force's primary mission of striking deep in enemy territory. To fund them the Air Force must take money away from its bombers and fighters, which is like asking the Business Roundtable to underwrite the FTC. So transport planes are always at the bottom of air force budget requests. (Similarly, troop ships usually bring up the rear of the Navy's budget.)

The Army should have seen this more clearly. The sort of transport plane it most badly needed was one that could land in proximity of the battle. That meant a small (harder to hit) plane able to operate off very short fields of grass, dirt, or whatever was handy. Operation from short "unimproved" runways was the requirement that infuriated the Air Force most. It dictated that transport planes be propeller-powered, since prop engines are more durable than jets and generally able to lift aircraft off the ground in the shortest distance. Props! The Air Force build a prop plane? Were army tanks pulled by mules? Did navy ships have sails? It was out of the question! So through the 1950s and early 1960s, little money was invested in transports. What few cargo planes the Air Force did build, the C-130 Hercules and the jet-powered C-141 Starlifter, needed concrete runways.

The only transport plane ever to excite Air Force interest was the C5A Galaxy. It met proper standards of grandeur by being complex, expensive, unreliable, and, best of all, the largest airplane in the world.

The Air Force found its second army "joint mission," close support, even more distasteful. Again the type of plane required played an influential role. Close-support airplanes are small (as before, harder to shoot down) with short, stubby wings for maximum maneuverability at low altitudes. Close-support planes spend nearly all their time at low altitudes, since their job is to find and attack small things moving around on the ground. They fly slowly, seldom at more than 380 m.p.h., so the pilot has time to figure out what's going on down below. It was the slowness of the job that most offended air force brass. Why, a close-support plane couldn't fly supersonic *at all.*

Also involved was a running Army-Air Force doctrinal dispute over the nature of war. The Air Force believes that "interdiction"—long-range bombing of factories, supply centers, and staging bases ("second echelon targets")—wins modern wars.

The Army, for its part, contends that "first echelon targets"—tanks and troops actively engaged in battle—are the real priority. Beat them, Army theorists maintain, and it doesn't matter what's going on at the ball-bearing warehouse. The Air Force was hardly interested in building close-support aircraft to help prove its own central doctrine wrong. So from the service's creation in 1947 until the early 1970s, it did not field a single close-support aircraft. And when it finally did, it was only because of interservice rivalries with an army helicopter.

By the late 1950s, helicopters had been perfected to the point that they were reasonably reliable for short, simple flights. General Carl Hutton (known as the father of army aviation) had successfully fired machine guns and small rockets from them. He dreamed of helicopters replacing both tanks and trucks as whole battalions went "air mobile." He gave his vision the wonderful name "Sky Cavalry." Effusion over helicopters was, at the time, becoming popular. City councils were rushing to mark out plans for "heliports."

By spring 1962 a Sky Cav unit had become a standard component of Army divisions. By fall 1962, the first helicopter division was on its way to Vietnam. Everything was coalescing in the helicopter's favor. Until it was actually used in combat.

Flying slowly and low over enemy positions, the helicopter exposed its numerous delicate components to easy destruction. Rifle bullets bounce off most warplanes, but they ripped up the (necessarily) lightly built helicopters. Ground gunners needed a bull's-eye to knock down a fighter, but it seemed that anywhere one hit a helicopter was sufficient to snap its delicate string to the sky.

Army planners thought their Sky Cavalry could surprise the enemy by dropping troops right into the middle of a fight—"vertical envelopment." That's how most helicopters were employed in Vietnam, and the losses were staggering. "The drop might actually take only 30 seconds," Hoven said, "but during that time you were hovering right in front of the enemy, and he was shooting into your engines and right through the door." (Losses during landings were the reason helicopter pilots could be shot down nine times and live to be shot down again. When their helicopters crashed, it was often from just five or ten feet.)

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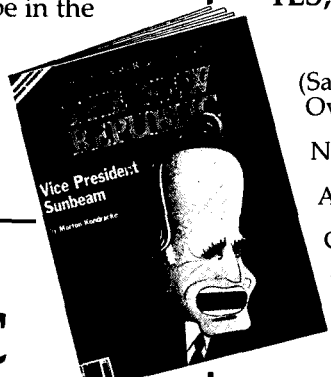

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THE NEW REPUBLIC

THE MINDS THAT MATTER

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Officially the Army lost "only" 4,900 helicopters in Vietnam, an "only" that equals more than half the entire helicopter inventory of 1966, one of the war's peak years. Pilots who were in Vietnam and Pentagon officials from the period say losses were systematically distorted—as, in this and so many other areas, like "body counts," Vietnam seemed to have established lying and institutional self-deception as proud Pentagon traditions. The key to manipulating helicopter losses was the aircraft's tail, where its serial number was painted. If the tail could be recovered from a wrecked helicopter—and often it could—it would be shipped back to the States and a new helicopter built around it, knowledgeable Pentagon sources say. They contend that if losses had been reported accurately, tables would show that fully one-third of all helicopters stationed in Vietnam were shot down or crashed each year. That suggests a total loss more along the order of 10,000 helicopters.

In February 1971, the Army launched Lam Son 719, a six-week massed helicopter "incursion" into Laos. Sky Cav units encountered ground fire from dual .50-caliber machine guns and the ZU-23-2, a 23mm light cannon that is the Soviet's main portable antiaircraft weapon. They destroyed, officially, 107 helicopters and "damaged" 608 more. Pentagon sources say that little more remained of many of the "damaged" helicopters than a salvageable tail with serial number. For days at a time during Lam Son, relief helicopters were unable to approach stranded squadrons because they could not buck the ground fire.

Helicopters, when surprised by enemy fire, have considerable trouble maneuvering away. Because of their light airframes and fragile rotor assemblies, helicopters cannot make the sharp, drastic banking maneuvers airplanes use to evade fire. The most helicopters can "pull" is about 2.5 times the force of gravity; fighter planes can generally pull around eight times gravity. Army planners thought they could compensate with the helicopter's unique ability to make a 180-degree turn, thus running directly away from fire. But this generally didn't work. What exposes an aircraft (or any target) to destruction is moving on a *predictable* course, so that enemy guns can be set slightly ahead of present position and the target will pass into their stream of fire. About-face maneuvers, while dramatic, were predictable. The helicopter was still flying the same straight line, just in the opposite direction. The back end got shot down instead of the front.

To protect themselves from ground gunners, Vietnam pilots adopted flying procedures army planners were sure they wouldn't need. Sometimes they flew at around 1,500 feet—out of the effective range of small-arms fire, but also too high to command what was going on on the ground. Other times they flew treetop level at 115 m.p.h., coming over the enemy so abruptly ground gunners had no time to get a shot off. Flying treetop there was no chance whatsoever to scan the ground—the pilot's attention was utterly devoted to flying. One of the many complications of helicopter flight is that both the pilot's feet and hands are busy at every instant. Unlike an airplane, a helicopter has no autopilot to speak of, and certainly none at treetop level. Add to this that helicopters are deafeningly loud and vibrate viciously, and it should be clear that operating them is, even under the best of conditions, a taxing job. (It is not well understood that what marine helicopter pilots attempted during the Iran rescue raid—a 500-mile ground-level flight in the dark—was an immensely demanding physical and mental feat.)

The two compromises—flying either too high or too low and fast to see—effectively negated many of the helicopter's advertised features. Flying this way, helicopters were just doing a poor imitation of airplanes. But of course they could take off and land anywhere they wanted, couldn't they? Well, they certainly couldn't land in fire zones. The takeoff advantages did not always prove out, either. When fully loaded, Cobra gunships were so unstable they could not rise straight up. They had to make running takeoffs, like airplanes. Any old place would not do.

Even once at the target, the vaunted Cobras were effective only against very lightly armed troops who could not drive them off. This Pentagon officials simply refused to believe. Sadly, Pentagon demands for Cobra "productivity" inspired some army commanders to send their gunships against defenseless villages and even water buffalo to keep kill statistics up.

Yet throughout the Vietnam war, the Army continued to pour more and more resources into helicopters. Some Washington-based officers, really believed the helicopter was an effective weapon. Others, mesmerized by their interservice duel with the Air Force, just would not entertain the notion that their solution to army aerial problems was fundamentally flawed. Meanwhile there was the budget to consider. Throughout the army hierarchy, an informed former officer said, there was a feeling that Vietnam had at last won the budget spotlight back from the Air Force and Navy. Obviously the army budget had to be expanded in order to prosecute the war. If they could drive the budget up high enough, the generals felt, it would remain high after the war was over, and the Army would never again be reduced to a subservient position in Pentagon politics. By far the most expensive item being used in Vietnam was the helicopter. Thus, perversely, helicopters became desirable for the very reason that they were so costly and crashing so often. □

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At the time the Monthly *was founded one of the most conspicuous characteristics of American liberals was their unwillingness to say anything bad about the good guys. Preeminent among these good guys were the unions, the great heroes of the New Deal coalition who had fought for social justice against the hired thugs of the mine owners and the auto companies. But in the seventies, stupid policies by labor unions were just as much a factor in our declining competitiveness as the short-sighted selfishness of managers. And we said so.*

Industrial America's Suicide Pact

by Phil Keisling

Phil Keisling's article was a prescient look at how management and *labor were to blame for the decline of industrial America. This piece appeared in 1982.*

Healthy, often profitable businesses are being debilitated and even killed off by corporate managers bent on maximizing short-term return to please Wall Street investors. Their concern is not with profit but with *how much* profit; not with the long-term health of an enterprise but with its ability to contribute to a dazzling quarterly earnings report. Belden Daniels, a professor of urban planning at MIT, observes: "Plants are closing that don't have to because we've trained our corporate managers to maximize their rate of return—not in ten years, not over one year, but over 90 days. Period. And it's killing us."

Unions show similarly self-destructive tendencies. Rather than moderate wages and benefits that have priced their employers' products out of the market, unions too often sacrifice their members' jobs to preserve the "integrity" of contracts. The attitude is best summed up by Peter Kelley, a UAW member and founder of a group called Locals Opposed to Concessions, who told *The Wall Street Journal*: "It is our firm belief that it wasn't our wages or benefits that caused the auto industry's problems in the first place. It was management." Think about that. Even if Kelley is correct, assigning the blame won't save jobs, and saving jobs is what we need to do.

There are several explanations for the unions' reluctance to make substantial concessions. The most obvious is the traditional animus between the two parties, fueled by memories of bad-faith bargaining. Unions deeply suspect that companies are using the recession to break them or to exact concessions they could not get otherwise. Union leaders also are understandably outraged at the extravagant salaries that corporate executives receive, most of which bear no relationship to actual performance.

But there's another, more personal reason union members often are willing to see jobs destroyed rather than make concessions. Older workers, under a new contract provision called the "rule of 65," can retire if they worked in a mill that was closed and their age plus years of service totals 65 or more. A 45-year-old worker who started at age 25 would be eligible for a pension of about $400 a month, payable even if he finds a job elsewhere.

These provisions highlight the fact that within unions, members have widely divergent interests. Younger workers, many of whom will get nothing from their contributions to the pension and supplemental unemployment funds, have an obvious interest in preserving their jobs. Though older workers suffer special problems in finding new employment, those who choose an early retirement can expect a good pension, a lot of free time, and the satisfaction of having "stood up" to the bosses.

If anything, the malfeasance of the other partner—corporate executives—in this *danse macabre* is even less excusable. The most egregious cases involve the closure of profitable enterprises in a manner that jeopardizes existing jobs. Indeed, this is the most glaring deficiency of American capitalism: its hostility to the marginally profitable firm. Just as unions insist on preserving higher-than-competitive wages even at the expense of jobs, so corporations insist that otherwise profitable enterprises be closed. If a plant can be expected to generate a 2-percent rate of return on investment over the long term, while lending the money out to the government would reap a 10-percent return, the shareholders' verdict is unequivocal: the plant deserves summary execution.

By the dictates of Wall Street, this makes perfect sense; but to workers and their communities, the logic is particularly perverse. Shutting such plants causes a litany of familiar repercussions: larger

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deficits resulting from swollen welfare rolls, strapped state and local relief efforts, increased health and emotional problems. These corporate decisions reverberate widely because the money that workers and their families once spent in the stricken area's retail shops, car dealerships, and other businesses dries up—generating additional unemployment.

The effort to resuscitate the nation's manufacturing base provides a perfect opportunity to promote the very essence of entrepreneurship: putting control of an enterprise in the hands of those with a real stake in its survival. However virtuous "public corporation" may sound, the notion is the bane of the low-return firm. Selling public stock subjects it to the dictates of outside investors, whose main purpose is not a factory's continued life but a sufficiently high return. Not so with privately held companies; to them, a 1-percent rate of return is perfectly tolerable if the owners know they're providing jobs and still making money. □

Pie-slicers vs. Pie-enlargers

by Robert Reich

This piece appeared in 1980.

Look around you, and you can see the rearrangers hard at work, prospering. They are the accountants who manipulate tax laws and depreciation rules to produce glowing—or at least presentable—annual reports. They are the financiers who think up new varieties of mutual funds. They are the corporate executives, trained in law and finance, who hire all of the above, and the lawyers whose briefcases bulge with the statutes, opinions, depositions, interrogatories, motions, and prospecti necessary to carry out their strategies.

Whom you hear less and less of are the pie-enlargers—the engineers and inventors who create better products at less cost, and the entrepreneurs and workers who translate those ideas into new factories, new jobs, and ultimately into goods and services that people want to buy.

The most obvious example is the continuing rage of mergers. In the past three years some $100 billion of corporate cash resources have been used to acquire existing corporate assets through tender offers. This money otherwise could have been spent on new factories and other productive uses. Some of it may eventually find its way into the hands of investors willing to take such risks—but just as surely, much of it does not. Instead of generating future economic expansion, the money circulates among companies like the stakes in a floating dice game.

How are we to break out of the downward spiral of asset rearranging? We could start with the tax system. Why not limit tax breaks to corporate earnings that are reinvested in new production, equipment, or research and development? A corporation's earnings could be immediately taxed as income to shareholders (without the capital gains break) unless the earnings were "rolled over" by the corporation into new investment. The same incentives could be given to individual shareholders themselves.

Likewise, in other areas the tax laws could target the tax breaks to apply only to fresh investments. The most obvious offender here is the congeries of loopholes—mortgage interest deductions, homeowner's exemptions, and capital gains treatment—that indiscriminately subsidize the trading of existing real estate. Instead, these tax breaks could be given only to those who invest in new buildings, creating the additional housing needed to ease our current shortage.

A second group of reforms would affect the means of financing business ventures. To discourage rearranging, the Federal Reserve could establish guidelines to make it more costly for banks to provide easy credit for speculation and conglomerate acquisition. To stimulate long-term investment, businesses could be freed from the impatient demands of stockholders through various government incentives that reduced their need to go to the stock market for financing. If you are going to encourage a long-run growth, for example, debt-financing has a great advantage, since as long as a corporation meets its interest payments, it is free to sacrifice short-term profits for long-term productivity.

A final set of changes should focus on the ownership of productive assets. Schemes of employee ownership and participation not only appear to improve productivity over the short term but they may also improve prospects for long-run growth, since employees typically have a higher stake in the continuing viability of an enterprise than do either managers or investors. And owners could be allowed to deduct losses more easily from personal income, and they could be freed from the host of levies—franchise taxes, gross receipts taxes, and Social Security taxes—that apply in full force whether or not their business has any profits.

We have seen a variety of quick-fixes proposed over the years. In evaluating the rash of remedies, we could begin by asking ourselves which strategies will stimulate more paper, and which more product. □

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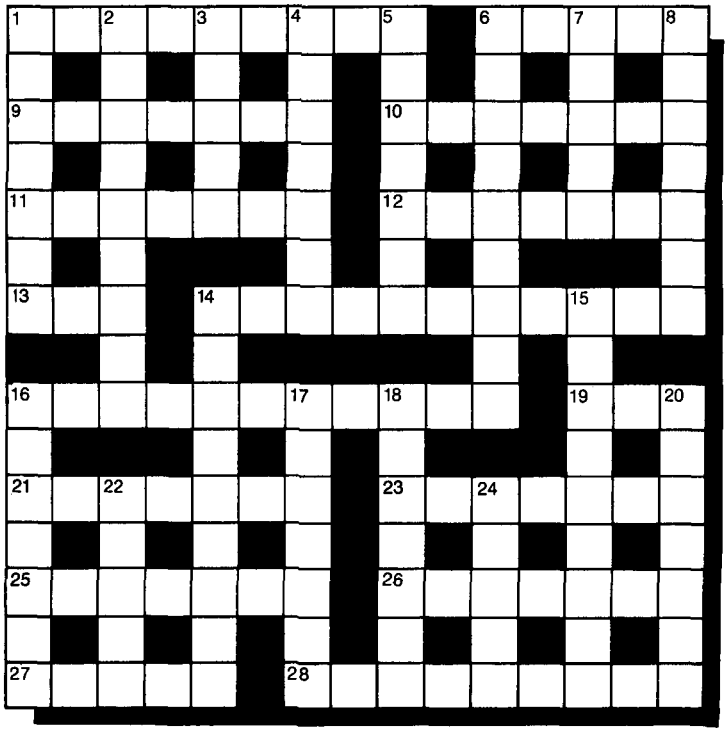
POLITICAL PUZZLE

by John Barclay

The numbers indicate the number of letters and words, e.g. (2,3) means a two-letter word followed by a three-letter word. Groups of letters, e.g. USA, are treated as one word.



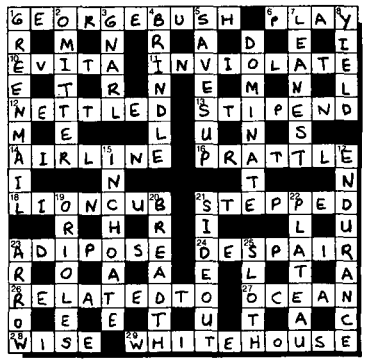
ACROSS

1. Versatile leader conjugated Chicago verb skipping 99. (9)
6. Arranged a test for baker. (5)
9. Road nut shaped up for Capitol Center. (7)
10. Indulge in new veto era. (7)
11. Collected same sad plays. (7)
12. Reading in Robert Lowell is only one writer. (7)
13. Letter sound can be private or evil. (3)
14. Reorganization of Israeli Minister's team? (11)
16. Insert madam carefully into peace discussion. (11)
19. Familiar Washington figure is demented in the end. (3)
21. Salvage carbon in Mailer letters. (7)
23. Fog trio managed to make an attempt. (2,3,2)
25. Criticize prisoner # 500 chopping up men. (7)
26. Buys stock in 3-piece suits? (7)
27. Returning troops overlooking nothing for fun. (5)
28. Tersely worded statements made Harpo miss. (9)

DOWN

1. Food remnants served a beggar. (7)
2. Checkers about Carter's rehabilitation. (9)
3. Gathering tunas for family members. (5)
4. Collector is more difficult about nothing. (7)
5. It's love gathering flowers. (7)
6. Be suspicious of awkward slam later. (5,1,3)
7. Saver gathered states. (5)
8. Weird noise at restless Soviet region. (7)
14. WAVE disturbed pet manner. (9)
15. Improperly resist ten participations. (9)
16. Manages scattered credits. (7)
17. Shaky ground for 1 Across in December. (7)
18. Spin shaped hinges around last portal. (7)
20. Abhors Delaware checks. (7)
22. River against Japanese game. (5)
24. Prefer to play faro around five. (5)

Answers to last month's puzzle:



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Closing Up Bars and Closing Up Shop on the Monongahela

by David Ignatius

David Ignatius, who wrote a pioneering article in the Monthly *on the fall of the steel industry in 1979, wrote this summary of his findings in 1988.*

Steel in the old days wasn't simply an industry. It was an entire culture, an all-American social system that produced an utterly disastrous outcome in which workers didn't work, managers didn't manage, and an entire industry slid year by year toward disaster.

On the union side the tragedy began with the United Steelworkers's first president, Philip Murray, whose views were conditioned by the bitter struggle to organize low-paid steelworkers in the 1930s. Though he was initially interested in labor-management cooperation schemes, Murray decided that the union's job was to raise wages and fringe benefits, rather than to participate in the larger task of running the enterprise for the good of all.

The union succeeded beyond Murray's wildest dreams. By the early 1980s, American steelworkers were the best-paid industrial workers in the world. From 1967 to 1979, total hourly employment costs in the industry rose at an annual rate of 12.1 percent—while the industry's production grew barely 2 percent a year. When this cozy, anticompetitive world was punctured by lower-cost foreign steel, the union had only one answer: import barriers.

Managers made a series of foolish strategic decisions: they continued to build huge open-hearth furnaces in the late 1950s, after other countries began to adopt the more modern oxygen-furnace technology; they spent vast sums to produce "pelletized" iron ore from their North American mines (which were no longer producing high-grade ore), rather than import foreign iron ore at about half the cost; and they vastly overestimated (by as much as 100 percent) the demand for American steel during the 1980s.

Worst of all, says John Hoerr, author of *And the Wolf Finally Came*, was the poisonous relationship that developed between workers and management, especially at the industry's largest company, U.S. Steel. He quotes one steelworker explaining the decline in morale: "In the 1950s, it was a pleasant place to work. . . .The people in the personnel office spent their lives there and knew workers personally." Then, in the 1960s, "the company brought in college grads as supervisors and sometimes paid them more than the general foremen who had come up the old way. This helped destroy working relationships. In the early 1970s, they began hiring attorneys to run personnel services. Most of them used it as a stepping stone and became tough bastards. 'If you want something, arbitrate!' they told us."

In this climate of bitterness, workers lost any remaining concern for the efficiency of the enterprise. Recalling his own summer jobs in the mills as a young man, Hoerr notes that "on the night turn, 11 p.m. to 7 a.m., more people may have been sleeping in National Tube than in all the hotels of McKeesport. It was a mark of esteem, the 'macho' thing of the day, to brag about sleeping on company time."□

Putting Yourself on the Line

Perhaps the most important advice this magazine has given its readers is Do Work You Believe In—put yourself on the line for the sake of your principles. The droves of talented people who have sacrificed interesting and important work simply to make a lot of money not only cheat society but cheat themselves too.

When the Monthly *was founded, entrepreneurs were not held in high esteem. Liberals lumped all businessmen together and called them Babbitts or robber barons. Conservatives defended businessmen generally, failing to distinguish between the one who enlarges the economic pie by creating new jobs, and the one who merely trades the existing slices—and too often failing to condemn the one who cheated*

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customers, exploited employees, or polluted the environment.

We applaud risk-takers—people who have the courage to start a new business or speak out against wrong actions by their superiors in government or business. Far too many people think of themselves merely as employees, with no responsibility for the actions of the organization they work for.

Putting Yourself on the Line

by Charles Peters

This piece appeared in 1974.

What we need is a rebirth of entrepreneurship. The adventure of creating something new, whether it be factory or school or clinic, has stirred the American soul in the past. But for too long it has been forgotten as our attitudes have been molded by a conservatism dedicated to the defense of established big business and by a liberalism too closely allied to big government and big labor, with branch offices in the foundations and the universities, where profit is a bad word.

Perhaps most to blame is the culture of liberal idealism, which automatically characterizes someone who goes into an urban planning consultantship as idealistic and classifies the person who decides to be a building contractor as comparatively base. The entrepreneur has become linked in the liberal mind with the robber baron who delights in destroying his competition. Sometimes he is just that. But he can in fact be a creator, equally deserving of praise or blame in terms of the quality of what he produces, as are the creators in the arts upon whom the liberal lavishes so much attention.

While our conservatives have been busy suppressing antitrust suits and bailing out every inefficient giant, the liberals have kept busy protecting their sinecures in government, the unions, and the wonderful world of nonprofit institutions, where tenure is king and ever-escalating salary without regard to performance the rule.

Because of the conspiracy of silence by the liberals, the perils of tenure have hardly been examined. Yet it is an evermore powerful fact of life in the civil service, in schools and universities, and increasingly in the great corporations, where an unofficial kind of tenure is more and more common.

In order to work well, particularly at something other than plain labor, people have to feel free to leave: they stay only because they choose to stay. The trouble is that structures like tenure, like any job that arranges your life for you, insuring against risk, providing a neat little stepladder on which to mark your progress, tends to weaken inner direction and sufficiency.

Another reason people stay in the government bureaucracies is money. More than 73,000 civilian government employees draw base salaries of more than $24,000 a year. By 1977 they will be making more than $36,000. (As this is written, federal government unions are threatening rebellion if they don't get an expected 5.5-percent pay increase this fall, and the militants among them are demanding a 30-hour week.) The money is, of course, even better in the big corporations and foundations.

But money is far from the whole story. Another factor is the need to function. Free-lance writer Paul Dickson has described the identity problem this way:

"You become extremely nervous about meeting new people because of the ever-present question, 'Who are you with?' When your answer fails to attach you to a recognized organization like *The New York Times*, or Nader's Raiders, or the Department of Labor, both parties to the conversation often become embarrassed by your obscurity. There is some second-echelon hope for you as, say, a writer, in the recovery question, 'Well, who do you write for?' If you have published for an organ of widely acknowledged distinction, such as *Harper's*, things will bounce back quickly, and the conversation can proceed.

Of course there are practical obstacles to going out on your own that can't be overlooked. You need some kind of financial cushion and a reasonable amount of encouragement and protection from the government. That's why there's a need for a guaranteed annual income, for tax incentives for new businesses, and for enforcement of antitrust laws. We also propose a system of payment for higher education that will put an end to the trap that a college education for their children means to most parents.

But many of these apparent obstacles to independence are really psychological ploys by which the imprisoned fool others and even themselves. Often the man who says he's staying in a job he hates for the sake of the kids is really pinning a martyr's badge on himself that will be paid for in the guilt of his children, who would be much better off with the mental health that comes from a happy home.

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And, surprisingly enough, more and more people who say they can't break away from General Motors because of the wife and kids really have enough capital to thumb their noses at the boss.

Out of the rut

You have to take responsibility for what your organization is doing, whether it's producing the best or worst product or service it's capable of producing, whether it's competing fairly, whether it's polluting or not polluting. Does our job really count? Are we doing it well? Does our organization do a good job? If not, we should be ready to find a new job or start a new organization.

Not everyone can, of course. Many people lack the money or the talent—or the youth in a society that scorns the aged. But far more have the option than are using it. Some are held back by greed; they don't want to give up the special little angle they have now. But others who could go out on their own are paralyzed by the fear of failure.

One begins to overcome that fear of failure with the realization that failure hurts most those who are aiming at success. When you're preoccupied with success in the sense of making it rather than doing your work, the appearance of success is everything. When your focus is on doing the job, failure today simply means you try again tomorrow. Ironically, failure is most likely when you are focused not on doing your job but on the identity it gives you.

We've got to get out of these ruts if we're to restore the health of this country. From the conservative must come the liberal's humanitarian concern for income security and medical care. From the liberal must come the old conservative respect for entrepreneurship. From both must come a new respect for free criticism of institutions, including their own. Together they can produce a climate that will encourage men to want to change from phony jobs to jobs that count, to want to reform their organization, and failing in that attempt, to form new organizations that will do the job better, to want to do well without having to kick the shit out of the other guy, to have the fun of waking up in the morning and saying I know I'm going to try to do what I want to do, not what someone else thinks I should do, not what will earn me social position or paper credentials, but what I enjoy doing and do well.□

Ralph Nader Reconsidered

by Jonathan Rowe

Among the individuals in our age who has most put himself on the line is Ralph Nader. This piece appeared in 1985.

I remember that day, in a law school dorm, that I happened upon a *Playboy* interview with this Nader fellow. The magazine dubbed him the "zealous consumer crusader," but it was the crusader rather than the consumer part that lit the fire. Here was a man who lived in a rooming house, owned no car, and kept his material wants to a minimum so he could do the work he really cared about. The pictures on the opening spread showed him in varying degrees of discomfort, as though defying the feel-good aura of the magazine. "Is it so implausible, so distasteful," Nader said, "that a man would believe deeply enough in his work to dedicate his life to it?"

It was Nader's commitment to the old-fashioned virtues of individual hard work, thrift, and civic responsibility that put him right at the geological fault line between profession and practice in American life—between the values a Reagan kitchen cabinet member might profess and the values his company spreads through its advertising. If this could seem a specter in the nation's boardrooms, it was also unsettling in Washington, where commitment is expected to remain within polite limits and where many people see no inconsistency between aspiring for a six-figure salary on the one hand and social values that include a cleaner environment or helping the poor on the other. Nader was saying that there was an individual price to be paid and ordered his own life accordingly.

It was enough to make people squirm a bit, and reporters were not exceptions. Granted, Nader's unconventional manner, and frugalities such as buying 12 pairs of shoes and four dozen socks at the PX before leaving the Army, understandably arouse curiosity. But reporters have tended to dismiss Nader's habits as eccentricities and have been reluctant to come to grips with the values that inform them.

I've always suspected that one of the things that so unhinges Nader's corporate critics is how much closer his own life is to the rags-to-riches American archetype than are their own. Here's a man who came to Washington with nothing and built a movement by dint of his own diligence and persistence and who has maintained complete independence of thought and action. Compare that to a James Roche, the GM chairman who had to apologize to Nader

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for the company's spying on him. Roche had joined GM at age 21 and stayed with the company all his life. Which one was the Andrew Carnegie, the builder and originator, and which one was the Khrushchev or Chernenko working his way up the bureaucratic ranks? Nader can even sound like the individualists of the bygone era. "Almost every significant breakthrough," he once told an audience, "has come from the spark, the drive, the initiative of one person. You must believe this." □

Hello Sweetheart, Get Me Mergers and Acquisitions

by Philip Weiss

As Philip Weiss showed, one who put himself on the line in the wrong way was Steven Rattner. This piece appeared in 1986.

On a night in August 1982, in a loud New York restaurant off Union Square, Steven Rattner, a London correspondent for *The New York Times*, and Roger Altman, an investment banker at Lehman Brothers Kuhn Loeb, met for dinner to discuss Rattner's future. The two had become good friends a couple of years earlier when Altman was an assistant secretary of the treasury and Rattner was covering Jimmy Carter's economic policy for the *Times*. Now Rattner, at the age of 30, had decided he wanted to leave journalism.

Rattner was one of the *Times*'s ablest writers. His rise in the organization had been rapid: at 22, clerk to James Reston; at 23, covering energy, one of the most important stories in the country; at 24, a full member of the Washington bureau; at 29, a foreign correspondent in a prestige bureau. But by the summer of 1982, Rattner felt he needed a change.

It was a good time to become an investment banker. Banking was changing, and Rattner had the personality for its competitive new environment of short-term relationships. His persuasive skills would be useful on deals, Altman told him. Working a client wasn't so different from working a source.

Altman was certainly right about its being a good time for banking. The new spirit of competition brought about by deregulation combined with the rise of a new materialist ethic, especially in Manhattan, had made investment banking glamorous in much the same way that journalism had been in the years after Watergate. Investment bankers and arbitragers were being profiled in mainstream publications like *Esquire* and *The Atlantic*. Radio stations quoted the gold price between rock songs.

Zelig and Rattner

But was this the right world for Rattner? As a student at Brown, Rattner had written idealistic editorials proclaiming that the country's moral fiber was "weak" and denouncing "global. . .corruption and disdain." It would seem only natural for such a person to wonder aloud whether Lehman Brothers offered avenues for socially useful work. But Altman does not recall that Rattner raised the question of whether investment banking was meaningful work except, he said, "in this sense. He wanted to know whether he'd be fulfilled by banking. Was it overly narrow?" Rattner asked Altman whether investment bankers ever lifted their noses from their spread sheets. He was a young man who had lived abroad and traveled widely. He had a feeling for good art. Altman assured Rattner that he would meet people who shared his intellectual curiosity and cultivation.

Rattner took the job. Barely a year and a half later he moved to the *New York Times* of investment banking, Morgan Stanley & Company, where in 1985 he brought in a stunning $33 million in fees. After just 18 months, he was promoted, at age 33, to "principal," a partner who cannot vote on firm policy. The jump usually takes six years.

When he left the *Times*, Rattner was earning about $50,000 a year; last year he is said to have made as much as a million. Rattner specializes in deals involving communications companies. Most of his time is devoted to mergers and acquisitions—helping to buy and sell media properties. In some cases, these efforts may have served to compromise the editorial quality of news organizations that, like *The New York Times*, have been known for valuing the product more than the bottom line.

In any age, there are certain people who, because they are both very smart and unusually reactive to their society, help illuminate prevailing values through their actions. Rattner's life seems emblematic of the spirit of the times. Rattner's career path, impressive as it is, has a conformist quality that calls to mind the Woody Allen character Zelig, the "chameleon man" who always took on the coloration of those around him. When journalism defined the spirit and values of a generation, Rattner was a journalist. Now that investment banking defines those things, he is an investment banker. This

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chameleon quality makes Rattner an instructive case study of the process by which many of today's best and brightest have lost interest in making a difference with their lives.

Investment banking doesn't have to be predatory and destructive. Beyond warding off unwanted takeovers, investment bankers can help foster the creation of new jobs or promote worker ownership.

On the other hand, most of Rattner's deals simply sop up dollars for morally neutral, if pointless purposes. Take Rattner's biggest deal of 1985: helping the owners of KTLA, a television station in Los Angeles, sell out to the Tribune Company of Chicago for $510 million, the most ever spent for a TV station. Golden West, Rattner's client, was in essence a group of speculators who had bought the station for $245 million just three years before from the former cowboy star Gene Autry. Though they operated the station, their primary interest was in seeing its value go up. The only mistake they made, the leader of the group told the *Los Angeles Times*, was in thinking it might take eight years to get $500 million. The KTLA deal was a classic "asset play." Ninety percent of the shares were owned by seven investment bankers who weren't particularly interested in running the TV station.

I asked Rattner to compare the social worth of reporting with that of investment banking. He sat back and held the bridge of his nose. "I have two answers," he began. "I guess in the cold light of—No, I don't know if that's true either." It was about the first time he'd faltered that afternoon. He paused, then spoke slowly. "It's something I've thought a lot about. I don't view investment banking as the ultimate social fulfillment to me. I do it because I like what I'm doing. And yet we all do have a responsibility to put something back.

"Being an investment banker for the last three years has made me realize more what all of us should do. I'm a failure at discharging all my social responsibilities. When you're a journalist, though, you convince yourself of your social usefulness and you don't worry about it. Being an investment banker strips that away. I won't tell you that it is a socially responsible profession, whatever the hell that means, but I won't say journalists are either."

Later, he said he often felt that reporters were motivated by the desire for glory and to "hobnob with the great and near great." It's a point to consider. Much as we might want it to, no job confers virtue automatically. What matters is the moral content of our actions in that job. What is troubling about Rattner is that in recognizing that no *profession* is inherently moral, he also seems to have given up on the idea that *individuals* should strive to be useful to society. □

Crime

If our fellow liberals found it hard to say anything bad about good guys like the unions, they were equally disinclined to say anything good about the bad guys. And for most liberals in 1969, the police, who were using clubs to break up antiwar demonstrations, were very definitely bad guys. It was as hard to get constructive criticism of law enforcement as it was of the military, which was of course considered to be composed entirely of war criminals. But we believed that such real crimes as murder and robbery did require effective police and tough law enforcement. Liberals of that time, however, seemed to have little concern for the victim and almost limitless faith in the criminal's potential for rehabilitation. This was accompanied by an automatic assumption that it was heresy to question the Warren Court's interpretation of constitutional provisions protecting rights of the accused. While we were to make clear that we shared few of these conventional liberal positions, we did understand that law enforcement had to be criticized when it was done brutally or to harrass and intimidate the innocent, as it was against blacks in the South.

Criminals Belong in Jail

by Tom Bethell

This piece appeared in 1976.

I read a remarkable story in *The Post* about a girl named Sally Ann Morris who had been shot in Georgetown:

"She and her boyfriend, Henry Miller, were walking down 33rd Street, heading for an M Street restaurant. . .when two men approached. As they passed the couple, one of the men pulled out a gun,

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cocked it, and stuck it in Sally Morris's back.

"Instinctively, Miller grabbed her and they started to run. After a few steps, she said, she heard gunfire and felt a slap at her back. 'It felt like a burning needle that went through me real quick. It sort of numbed me'. . .The bullet ripped through her intestinal tract and lodged in her lower abdomen. . . .Doctors had to perform a colostomy, rerouting the undamaged intestinal tract to a substitute opening in her lower abdomen. This type of operation allows body waste to be passed into a disposable plastic bag attached to the new opening."

And this unbelievable paragraph: "Compounding all this is the fear that the ordeal is not yet over and that her assailants may return to kill her. Four suspects arrested in the case, who were released on personal recognizance pending trial, promptly disappeared and are at large today."

What was going on here?

"I don't know the details of the case," said Lee Cross, an assistant U.S. attorney, when I mentioned Sally Ann Morris. "But here's the main point. The judge may not set financial conditions on release merely to ensure the safety of the community. He may only do that if the prosecutor shows likelihood of flight by the accused."

"Merely" to ensure the safety of the community? That seemed odd, I thought.

"To hold them, you have to use preventive detention," Lee Cross went on, "and you will recall the screaming that went on among liberals when that was passed by Congress."

I hadn't realized that "preventive detention" meant holding suspects charged with such crimes as murder and rape prior to trial.

As many as 1,000 cases in D.C. are dropped each year because of witness intimidation.

I went to the Bench Warrant section and requested to see the "jacket" on cases 48406 and 48407, for James A. Weeks and Roy Wade Weeks, the male suspects in the Sally Ann Morris case. Roy Weeks was listed as living on 10th Street, N.W., and as having resided there "for three months, with girl friend." James Weeks had been living on A Street, S.E., "for one month." Eunice Walker, an alleged accomplice, was listed as living on A Street, S.E., for "three weeks." Police were still searching for Roy and James Weeks, as well as Eunice Walker.

A good deal of damage had been done by the "liberal" rhetoric of the previous decade. The liberal usually spoke as the reasonable man who merely opposed unfairness and inequality. As a result, whoever called for harsher treatment of violent offenders was often subtly painted as a racist; whoever called for less lenient judges was viewed as a primitive lacking in higher education; whoever demanded longer sentences was, surely, insensitive to the social roots of crime; whoever argued that prisons were primarily for punishment and only secondarily "correctional facilities," as they are often today officially dubbed, was surely an anachronism from the Stone Age; whoever urged that suspects charged with violent crimes be locked up before trial was alleged to hold the Constitution in low esteem, if indeed he had ever heard of it.

There is something very wrong with a society in which, in the name of the presumption of innocence, the suspect is freed and the witness must then be protected; in which a girl who has been shot in the back must hide from her attackers because the suspects were freed after being caught; in which convicted armed robbers roam the streets after they have been sentenced; in which the concept of punishment has been almost entirely discredited. □

Abolish the Fifth Amendment

by Mickey Kaus

This piece appeared in 1980.

Suppose you were suddenly arrested by the police and accused of 62 rapes. Would you stay silent? Of course not. You would clearly and emphatically tell the police they were wrong and offer whatever evidence you had that would confirm your story. There is an exception to this normal response, of course—one situation in which you would cling to the Fifth Amendment like a life preserver. That is if you were guilty.

This logic is inescapable, and it is the main problem with the Fifth Amendment. Other parts of the Bill of Rights—concerning free speech, freedom from unreasonable searches, the right to a jury trial, to name a few—are clearly designed to protect all citizens, guilty or innocent. But "the Fifth," almost by definition, protects only the guilty.

The Fifth Amendment isn't, and wasn't, in any way necessary to outlaw the Star Chamber abuses it is said to protect us against. If we want to ban torture—as surely we do—then we need a provision that bans torture, and perhaps sets severe penalties for any government official caught in the act. To prevent government probes into our political and religious associations, we need an amendment banning that—as the First Amendment, we may hope,

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already does. Another Amendment (the Sixth) already takes care of the right of a defendant to know the charges against him and to confront his accusers.

The Fifth Amendment goes beyond these rights and creates a far more dubious privilege: a right of ordinary criminals to conceal their crimes. The Amendment is used most frequently in cases where it prevents a suspect from being asked in a civilized manner to tell about his actions, in a courtroom in which he will be afforded every other procedural protection known to the Anglo-Saxon legal mind.

When we think of the Fifth Amendment, instead of recalling the Star Chamber or Joe McCarthy, it would be more accurate to think of the assorted Mafiosi, drug smugglers, tax cheats, and labor racketeers who make up the Amendment's natural constituency. For the rest of us, the Fifth Amendment offers nothing. □

Busting Our Mental Blocks on Drugs and Crime

by Suzannah Lessard

Suzannah Lessard recognized that the drug laws meant to protect us only made things more dangerous. This piece appeared in 1971.

When a drug problem is dealt with in strictly criminal terms, addicts have no choice but to seek out a black market. The dope underworld, in a nation where there are 200,000 addicts and yet heroin is contraband, develops into a grotesque, over-heated form of capitalism. The stakes are high enough to attract the biggest operators, and a small number tend to gain a monopoly.

Zealous enforcement only impels the racketeers to more ingeniously furtive ways, and the greater risk is reflected in the price, once again benefiting the crooks and victimizing the addict. Under the circumstances, he has to turn to crime to support his increasingly expensive habit. The odds for corruption of police are also high. In the course of duty, an agent is bound to come across stashes of heroin worth 50 times their weight in gold, not to mention large sums of money. The quick profits are so tempting that the minute one source is cut off another fills its place.

The quickest, surest way of neutralizing the mercenary motive would be to make drugs legally accessible at normal prices through doctors' prescriptions—in other words, to approach addictions as a purely medical/psychological problem without any criminal overtones.

Ideally, profits should in no way be associated with the distribution—inciting greed to advertise, promote, or in any way push drugs—and drugs would have to be kept away from children, but should be available to those who want them and need them. That way, the addict-populated ghettos would not suffer the extraordinary crime rates and the consequent fear, deterioration of social bonds, and abject poverty that come about when a good portion of the population has to spend its time and energies hustling to quell a craving. □

Black Fear: Law and Justice in Rural Georgia

by Taylor Branch

While liberals may have romanticized criminals, they were profoundly right to understand that the law can be a tool of oppression in the hands of racist or abusive police. Taylor Branch's new book, Parting the Waters: America in the King Years, 1954-1963, *is a meticulous and sweeping account of the fight for racial justice. Here he dissected for* Washington Monthly *readers some of the racial fears that once regularly stalked the South. This piece appeared in 1970.*

"All right, get the money off the table," said Bubba-doo Wiggins, the proprietor of The Big Apple in Cuthbert, Georgia, as he jumped from his perch with a can of Colt 45 and a fistful of house-cut dollars. In what resembled the routine panic of a grammar-school fire drill, he herded all the card

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players across the hall into a small closet on the mysterious side of the shack. The younger people scattered. The white man, a graduate student visiting the town, followed the pack, disoriented, and was the last to squeeze into the tiny room.

"What the hell is going on?" he whispered to his fellow loser.

"Beer truck," he replied, obviously amused at the other's perplexity.

Through a crack in the door, the stranger could see Bubba-doo behind the bar. He saw the proprietor put down his Colt 45 to greet two uniformed white men who ambled up and began some small talk.

"Who's that, the sheriff?" whispered the white man to the loser.

"No, the police," he said. "They go around with the beer truck every Friday."

The screen door closed again, and a rotund white man soon came into view, wheeling a half-dozen cases of beer up to the bar. He was wearing a Schlitz uniform and smoking a cigar. He left for another load.

Bubba-doo soon rapped on the door with the all-clear sign, and the poker players tumbled out into the hallway. The white man ran to a window in time to watch the beer truck stir up the red dust, with the police car right behind.

Unfortunately, the poker game had evaporated. As the others filed past on their way home for supper, the stranger decided that their interest in him was directly related to whether or not his pockets were full.

"No more game here, man," observed his fellow loser.

The two losers walked across the room, past the juke-box, and out into The Big Apple's front porch, where the strains of a twilight hymn from the revival floated on the summer air.

"Whatchew doing down here in niggertown?" came a voice from the police car, which had drifted back down the road, evidently having finished its beer run.

"Sir?"

"I said whatchew doing down here in niggertown?"

"I'm, you know, I'm doing a manpower survey for the university. Uh, I'm seeing about the kind of jobs these people have around here."

"You what?"

The stranger walked down the steps and over to the passenger side of the police car, experiencing all the physical symptoms of acute fear—shaking, sweating, burning skin, gulping, pounding heart, dry mouth, cold hands, wobbling knees, cloudy, swirling brain.

"You ain't down here trying to stir up our niggers,

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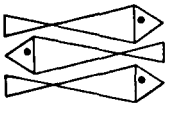

Hill and Wang

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are you?"

"No, sir."

"We treat our niggers real good around here, so we ain't had no riots or anything, and we aim to keep it that way. Do you know you could get knifed down here easy as that?"

"No, sir," said the accused, looking surprised and hoping that the policeman would take him for a bumbling student, which seemed accurate enough.

From the white people's point of view, the operation of the law is a distinctly informal business in southwest Georgia. Few local whites are ever arrested, other than a drunk or two, and the main concerns of the law are traffic tickets and the maintenance of calm among the black people. Neither task draws much attention from most white people, and keeping the lid on the black parts of town seems so easy that it produces boredom. Consequently, police officers are often picked up off the street or garbage truck. Tales abound of the illiterate officer who spends years perfecting a routine that will induce motorists to fill out their own traffic tickets without suspecting his illiteracy.

If policemen seem rather overlooked by the white people, the negroes act in compensation, for black people see them as the symbol of white power. The policeman represents more than violence or the fact that whites inevitably win any interracial legal battle. The man who rose from the pool room to the police car symbolizes the unpredictability of law enforcement for blacks. Lacking the restraint and formality of school-book law, he uses his badge as he sees fit and is often governed by an ornery mood.

Only a dramatic, violent abuse of a black person bears much risk for the law officer, and such incidents have declined markedly in the past decade. Many counties have found that the emotion of a police murder unites the black people in a brief outburst of angry action with enormous potential for organization and contagion.

In a rural setting, few incidents occur in which large groups of black people are harmed. The result is that when John sees Sam get beaten, he says, "Sam got beaten and I didn't," rather than "a black man named Sam got beaten because he is black like me." Black people tend not to see white violence in collective terms, even though the racial pattern is obvious; and the idea of a rural black community is therefore largely a myth. Perhaps this perception is due primarily to the nature of violence itself, in that the threat of immediate violence excludes everything from the individual's mind except himself and the threat. Anyone who has even been momentarily afraid knows how fear totally dominates the environment and makes one focus entirely on the threat. Fear is a highly individual emotion, and it appears to atomize black people in the rural setting. This atomization, in turn, appears to facilitate a high level of conflict among black people, as group loyalties are too weak to contain frustrations. □

Notes on the authors—

Russell Baker is a columnist for *The New York Times*.

James Boyd, author of *Above the Law*, worked on a senator's staff for six years.

Susan Ohanian is an educator in Schenectady, New York.

William and Elizabeth Paddock are the authors of *We Don't Know How.*

Robert Reich is professor at the Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University.

Kathleen Kennedy Townsend works for the State of Maryland, where she promotes service programs for high school students.

Philip Weiss is a New York writer.

The following authors have all been editors of *The Washington Monthly*—

Jonathan Alter is a senior writer at *Newsweek.*

Tom Bethell is a fellow of the Hoover Institution.

Taylor Branch is the author of *Parting the Waters: America in the King Years, 1954-63.*

Gregg Easterbrook is a contributing editor of *Newsweek.*

James Fallows reports for *The Atlantic* from Yokohama, Japan.

David Ignatius is editor of *The Washington Post* "Outlook" section.

Mickey Kaus is a senior editor of *The New Republic.*

Phil Keisling is a member of the Oregon House of Representatives.

Michael Kinsley, the editor of *The New Republic*, is on sabbatical in London where he is working for *The Economist.*

Suzannah Lessard is a staff writer for *The New Yorker.*

Joseph Nocera, a contributing editor of *Newsweek*, is writing a history of personal finance.

Charles Peters is the editor in chief of *The Washington Monthly.*

John Rothchild is a writer in Miami Beach, Florida. His most recent book is *A Fool and His Money.*

Jonathan Rowe is a correspondent for *The Christian Science Monitor.*

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POLITICAL BOOKNOTES

The New Yorker Book of War Pieces. Anthology. *Schocken Books, $12.95.* One is tempted by the democratic urge to say that war reporting is no different than any other kind of reporting. But it wouldn't be accurate. True, you ask the same species of questions you ask when covering a story at city hall—who did what to whom, what were the motives, who's covering up information and why, etc.—and you employ the same skills of curiosity, doggedness, cunning, and occasionally arrogance to try to find out what's going on behind the official announcement. Yet when the story is about fellow humans being maimed and killed in large numbers, about whole nations thrown into disoriented confusion as they mobilize against imminent invasion, about cold fear as a constant in daily life and everyone struggling against it to achieve the appearance of normalcy, then the reporting does indeed take on a different quality—not least because the traditional teaching instilled in journalists to stay removed, not be touched, hold all emotion in check, finds itself, in wartime, thoroughly challenged and often stripped away.

Where traditional journalism speaks in a language that is controlled and sometimes veiled, reporting on war does not remit such remoteness. It demands intimacy. And it is this closeness, this attention to humanness, that makes the recent republication of *The New Yorker Book of War Pieces*, a collection of World War II articles from the magazine that was first issued in 1947, an occasion for applause. For while every piece in this anthology is not equally vivid or memorable, the overall aura of the book is one of distinguished, at times classic, journalism.

The collection also serves to remind us that magazines of quality like *The New Yorker* give writers a freedom they do not always enjoy on, say, newspapers, where too often the qualities of liveliness and flavor and the juice of real life are squeezed out of the copy in the rote-invoked names of objectivity and discipline. I myself, when I was overseas for a newspaper, had gifted editors who encouraged me to breathe, and I therefore suffered no such suffocation. But I think the norm on newspapers generally lies elsewhere—in homogenized forms more inhibiting than these chronicles of the second great war.

Here, as an example, is A.J. Liebling from Paris in the summer of 1940, as the German army draws closer and he is forced to make hasty plans to depart: "From the Spanish Consulate, I went to the Prefecture of Police, where I asked for a visa that would permit me to leave France. A woman police official, a sort of chief clerk, said, 'Leave your passport and come back for it in not less than four days.' 'But by that time, Madame,' I said, 'the Germans may be here and the Prefecture may not exist.' Naturally, I didn't leave the passport, but I was foolish to question the permanency of the Prefecture. The French civil servants are the one class unaffected by revolution or conquest. The Germans were to come, as it turned out, but the Prefecture was to stay open, its personnel and routine unchanged. Its great accumulation of information about individual Frenchmen, so useful for the apprehension of patriots and the blackmailing of politicians, was to be at the disposal of the Germans as it had been at Phillipe-Egalite's and Napoleon the Little's and Stavisky's. The well-fed young *agents* were to continue on the same beats, unaffected by the end of the war they had never had to fight in. Yesterday the Prefecture had obeyed the orders of M. Mendel, who hated the Ger-

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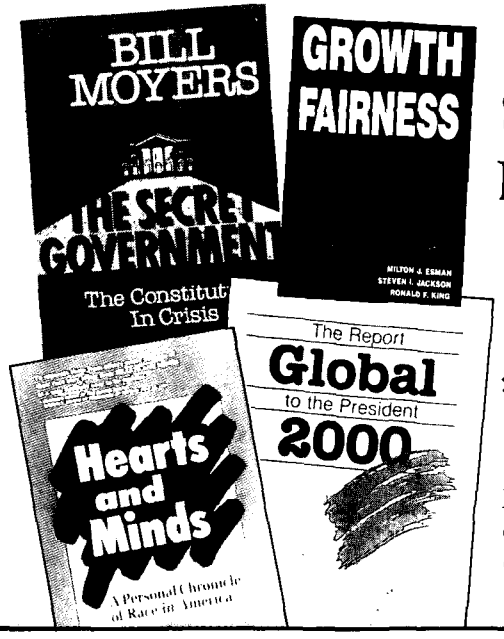

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mans. Now it would obey Herr Abetz, who hated Jews. Change of administration. *Tant pis.*"

In a more violent setting later in the war, Walter Bernstein, a writer who was not an accredited war correspondent but instead a foot soldier assigned to a reconnaissance platoon in a regiment that was pushing north through Italy, is walking down a hill when he encounters, climbing up from the other direction, four G.I.'s carrying a wounded man on a blanket stretched between them:

"He lay very still. The men came slowly toward me, carrying the blanket with great care. . .their eyes were deep in their sockets. . .one of the two front men said, 'You know where the medics are?' His voice was too tired to have any expression; it seemed to come from a long distance. I said I didn't know. 'We got to find the medics,' the soldier said. 'We got a man hurt bad.' I said they would have to climb the hill and then maybe they could send down from the observation post for one of the first-aid men at the C.P. The soldier was silent for a while, then he said again, 'We got to find the medics.' The three other men stood silent, looking at the one who was talking. The blanket was stiff with caked blood. The wounded man was scarcely breathing. Once in a while his fingers twitched and tapped weakly on the blanket. . . .'Thank you,' the man who had spoken to me said. . . .They began to walk again, synchronizing their steps so that they wouldn't shake the blanket. . . .They moved up the path slowly, like sleepwalkers, and I watched until they turned the corner and were out of sight. Then I went on along the path, following the trail of blood they left."

And then there is Guy Remington, a paratrooper lieutenant making a jump into Normandy on D-Day, in the dark, amid withering fire from the ground. He wrote: "The green light flashed on at seven minutes past midnight. The jump master shouted, 'Go!' I was the second man out. The black Normandy pastures tilted and turned far beneath me. The first German flare came arching up, and instantly machine guns and 40-millimeter guns began firing from the corners of the fields, striping the night with yellow, green, blue, and red tracers. I pitched down through a wild Fourth of July. Fire licked through the sky and blazed around the transports heaving high overhead. I saw some of them go plunging down in flames. One of them came down with a trooper, whose parachute had become caught on the tailpiece, streaming out behind. I heard a loud gush of air; a man went hurtling past, only a few yards away, his parachute collapsed and burning. Other parachutes, with men whose legs had been shot off slumped in the harness, floated gently toward the earth." Remington, his chute riddled, somehow survives the crossfire and lands in a garden. He examines himself and cannot believe his miracle: "There were four tracer holes through one of my pants legs, two through the other, and another bullet had ripped off both breast pockets, but I hadn't a scratch."

All the varieties of good war reporting are here—hometown stories about American soldiers like Caruso, "a small and very dark Italian with a big nose, who used to work for Bloomingdale's"; stories about English families bombed out of their homes who get on with it nonetheless ("So long as I get my old woman 'ome [from the hospital], everything will be all right. I don't worry about nothing else."); stories about abandoned European farmhouses where left-behind personal papers tell of simple existences torn asunder by grievous casualties; stories about the hellish beaches on D-Day; stories about the Kamikaze raids on allied troops in the Pacific as they fought to take Okinawa and other Japanese-held islands; stories about victory celebrations in Paris and London and the Philippines ("Long live the Americans! Lovely Americans!" the Filipinos shouted); and, finally, John Hersey's exquisite and aching recounting of what it was like "at exactly fifteen minutes past eight in the morning, on August 6, 1945, Japanese time, at the moment when the atomic bomb flashed above Hiroshima"—told through the eyes of six Japanese survivors.

There is of course much that is ageless here; mostly, wars tend to change only in the refinements of lethal technology, which have enabled us to destroy targets and kill people more efficiently and in greater quantities. The chronicles of sacrifice and grief and loss and exultation remain

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much the same. Yet in reading a volume of war correspondence from a time that is now 50 years in the past, one is nevertheless struck by attitudes and modes of writing that, for better or worse, have fallen out of use and would not likely find their way into print today.

In much the same way that witnessing an execution can make the witnesses less enthusiastic about the death penalty, the arrival of the awfulness of war in our living rooms through television has made war itself as an instrument of state policy less acceptable than when it could only be read about on the printed page or listened to in radio dispatches. We don't, as commonly as we once did, talk about war in the jingoistic language of athletic competition—as in "Let's go bloody the Huns' noses!"

Also, we as Americans do not feel as heady and muscular and indomitable as we did after making our comeback and conquering fanatical foes in World War II. All enemies are not as clear cut and evil as was Hitler and his Third Reich.

Throughout the *New Yorker* collection, the identification of the reporters with American and allied troops is so complete—and appropriate—that the accounts abound with references like "it took us three hours to clean them out" or "as soon as our troops came in" or "while we were stalled." It does not suggest a diminution of patriotism to note that American journalists, since Vietnam, are not as likely to use "we" and "us" in such automatic fashion anymore. When the national interest becomes blurred, journalists tend to adopt a more independent voice. They ask more questions about the purpose of their government and do not so facilely indicate in their use of language that they have taken sides.

Some critics saw a lack of national spirit in the Vietnam reportage, or even disloyalty, but I reject this interpretation. I believe the journalists (including myself) were merely reflecting the malaise they found both in American troop units and at American embassies about what the United States was doing in Southeast Asia. Were we there because the national security was at stake? Or did we get mired there through poor judgment and then find ourselves absent the maturity to correct the mistake early on? In a curious way, it was America, not our Asian adversary, which was afraid to lose face.

Thus, as the world changed from a place where we saw right and wrong in bold relief into a place where the conflicts became murkier in their origins and purpose, the good guy-bad guy aspects of war reporting changed, too.

What has not changed is the stuff that makes for superior war correspondence, regardless of what country the reporter is from or what war he is covering.

Unlikely as it may sound, war reporting in the wrong hands can be just as tedious and dry as any other form of journalism. A story that merely compiles a list of troop movements, bridges blown, roads cut and reopened, casualty statistics, and meaningless pronouncements from the high command is no more readable than a story written in the same manner about the national trade deficit.

The difference is that a war story written this way is less forgivable than a lumpish fiscal story, because crisis situations place more truth on the surface that the reporter can have for the taking. When rockets are falling on civilian populations, the usual psychic devices that people use to disguise their true feelings fall away. There is little room for public faces or emotional camouflage when life is reduced to primal instincts—raw fright, protecting one's family, foraging for food, escaping the war zone. People, sophisticates and peasants alike, speak naked truth in these circumstances because there is no longer any place for sham. And the aware reporter can enter this primal world and, through his dispatches, draw his distant safe-at-home audience into its feral texture in a gritty, electric way that is possible in few other settings.

The war reporter's goal as he sits down at his typewriter day after day must be to paint a word picture for the reader that says: "This is exactly what it was like, without frills or euphemism, where I was today." It is this transference of the reader to the unsanitized theaters of war the *New Yorker* collection achieves with exceptional heart and skill.

—*Sydney H. Schanberg*

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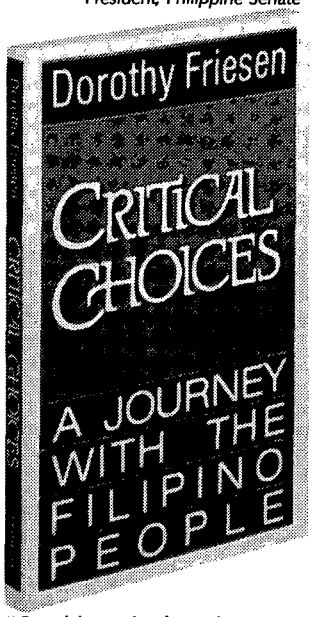

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Surprise Attack: The Victim's Perspective. Ephraim Kam. *Harvard University Press, $25.* Surprise attack is probably not high on your list of worries. Among a great many other factors, argues the Israeli National Defense College's Ephraim Kam, that's one of the things that makes it so probable. In fact, the United States seems particularly susceptible. Two of our last three wars began with an enemy surprise attack—the December 7, 1941 Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor that brought us into World War II, the June 27, 1950 North Korean invasion of South Korea that began the Korean War, and, finally, the North Vietnamese/Viet Cong 1968 Tet Offensive that unnerved our then commander-in-chief.

But surely, you may say, in this age of technical intelligence, of electronic surveillance, of spy satellites alerting us to the enemy's every move, surprise attack is a thing of the past. You'd be in good company with such beliefs. "It is very rare," wrote the preeminent military theorist Carl von Clausewitz in 1832, "that one state surprises another." In his classic 1938 work, *Surprise*, German General Waldemar Erfurth noted that "strategic surprise in the 20th century [is] the most difficult military undertaking."

While acknowledging surprise as one of the nine classic principles of war, the Army's May 1986 *Field Manual 100-5: Operations* states, "strategic surprise is difficult to achieve. Rapid advances in strategic surveillance technology make it increasingly more difficult to mask the large-scale marshalling or movement of manpower and equipment."

Far from being obsolete, it is Kam's conclusion that "improvements in communications, transportation, and weapons systems, including the use of tanks and air power; new bureaucratic structures and advanced procedures for systematic problem solving" have resulted in an "increase in opportunities for strategic surprise."

The numbers appear to bear him out. Of the wealth of examples available since 1939 alone, Kam bases his analysis on 11 major surprise attacks—three German invasions (Denmark and Norway in April 1940; France, the Netherlands, and Belgium in May 1940; and Russia in June 1941), two Japanese invasions (Pearl Harbor in December 1941; Malaya and Singapore from December 1941 to February 1942), two attacks in Korea (the North Korean invasion in June 1950; the Chinese intervention in October 1950), the Chinese attack on India in October 1962, two Israeli attacks (Sinai in October 1956; Egypt in June 1967), and the Egyptian-Syrian attack on Israel in October 1973.

"The striking thing about a surprise attack," Kam observes, "is that in retrospect one can never quite understand how it could have happened." But it looks simple only in hindsight.

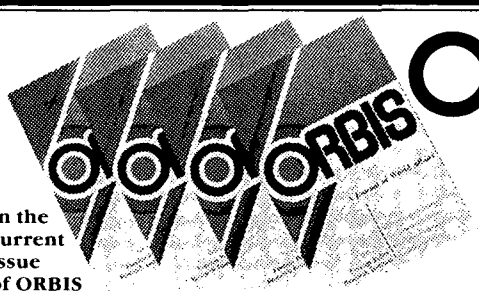
Using psychological analysis as well as communications theory, Kam examines these surprise attacks at four levels. First and most important is that of the individual analyst (Kam's "central assumption is that mistakes made at this level determine the failure to anticipate war"). Second is that of the small group of analysts and third is the larger group of the intelligence community and the military organization. Finally, there are the decision makers and their relationship with the intelligence community.

His analysis is not easy going. But the rewards are more than worth the effort. Not only does Kam offer insights into the human mind, explanations of small- and large-group dynamics, and a better understanding of the decision-making process (all useful beyond the narrow question of predicting surprise attacks), he also provides a convincing argument that "surprise attacks are indeed almost inevitable."

Kam highlights three reasons why—the quality of information available for judging and predicting enemy behavior, the persistence of conception even in the face of contradictory evidence, and the inherent interdependency of the many aspects of surprise attack that "makes it very difficult, perhaps even impossible, to locate the weak link in the chain and prevent future surprise attacks."

As he says, "this study concludes on a pessimistic note." But that pessimistic note can be valuable if it shocks us out of our false sense of complacency that somehow America is immune from surprise attack. We haven't been. We're not now.

—*Col. Harry G. Summers Jr.*



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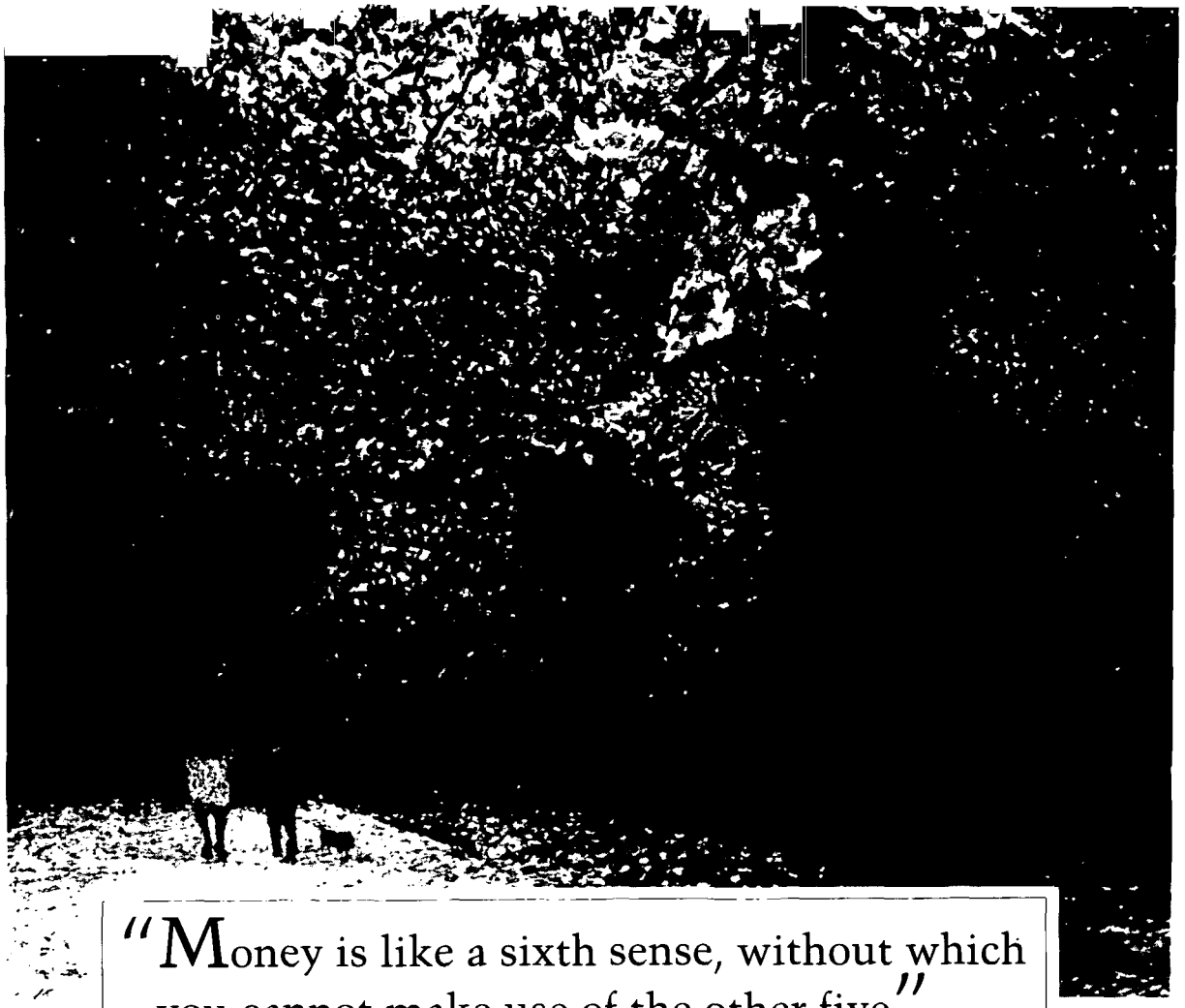

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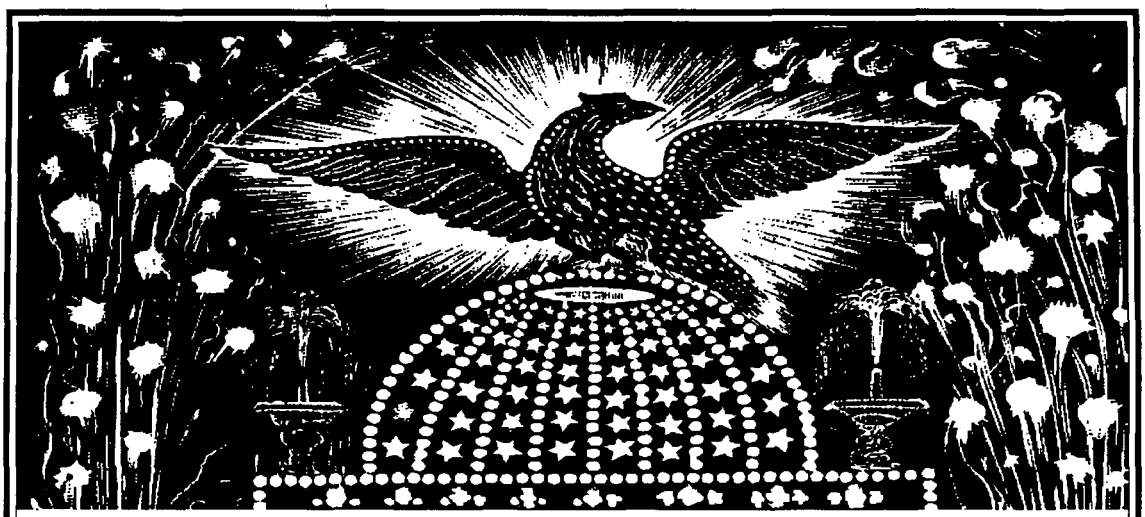

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